

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**STAFF TURNOVER AT A DURBAN OUTBOUND CONTACT  
CENTRE**

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- My parents for providing me with the opportunities I've had for a good education, for reminding me of what is important and for their unwavering support in this and all that I do.

## **ABSTRACT**

Staff turnover is one of the biggest problems in any contact centre for the effect it can have on the operation and the ultimate profitability of the business (Kgomo & Swarts, 2010). This research seeks to analyse specific factors contributing to staff turnover and offers recommendations on what can be done to address them.

The research studied the particular circumstances of Durcall, a Durban based outbound contact centre, and investigated the impact that agents reasons for joining, their expectations at recruitment and the influence that training and supervisors have on the company's staff turnover. The significance of the study was based on the impact that very high levels of turnover were having on the company's productivity and profitability.

A quantitative study was undertaken to determine the potential magnitude of the different contributors to turnover and was conducted on a sample of 270 agents at the company's Durban offices by means of a paper-based questionnaire, resulting in an 82% response rate.

The results revealed the transitory approach that employees have to a job that is not considered a career but a stop-gap to something better. It highlighted the critical role the supervisor plays in an agent's attitude toward the job, along with the need for adequate training and stress management in what is an intense occupation.

The study generated recommendations on how Durcall can seek to reduce attrition through changes to its recruitment processes and training as well as a more macro view on the need for a cohesive industry body to promote the image of call centres in the eyes of prospective and existing employees.

The study also offers some insights into outbound contact centres specifically where much of the contemporary literature focuses on customer service type roles or discusses call centres in general.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH**

---

### **1.1 Introduction**

Staff turnover is one of the biggest problems in any contact centre (Kgomo & Swarts, 2010). Indeed, call centres have been referred to as the “new sweatshops or dark satanic mills” (Apostol, 1996 cited in Fernie & Metcalf, 1998); the “electronic panopticon” (Fernie & Metcalf, 1998) for their claustrophobic monitoring of staff; “assembly lines in the head” (Taylor & Bain, 1999) or simply as “emotional labour” (Deery, Iverson & Walsh, 2002; Deery & Kinnie, 2004, Kinman, 2009). This research seeks to analyse specific factors contributing to this situation and to identify the impact that these factors have on staff turnover and offers recommendations on what can be done to address them.

Much academic research has been conducted into the various contributors to staff turnover such as job satisfaction, motivation, work organisation and job design (Kgomo & Swarts, 2010, cites Sheridan 1992, p.1036, Guthrie 2001, p.190 and Blum, Gilson & Shalley 2000, p.223). These constructs have received considerable attention in business literature, the media and the myriad of consultants that engage with the industry on all aspects of operational and employee performance and management, and yet the problem persists.

This research focuses on a narrow field within the broad scope of contributing factors as to why agents resign their jobs, specifically by limiting it to Durcall, a Durban based outsource provider of outbound services (telesales), and by analysing in depth the impact of five particular factors on agents’ intentions to resign. The research was undertaken because of the particular impact that staff turnover was having at the company in an effort to help redress the situation.

### **1.2 Background to the Study**

Call centres have become principal channels of communication with customers (Banks & Roodt, 2011) and a cost effective delivery method of product to many sectors of society. However, the high turnover of frontline staff in call centres is detrimental both in the delivery of quality services to these customers and to the business’ profitability, which is

undermined by disrupted schedules and the constant recruitment and training of replacements. Perhaps even more damaging is the opportunity cost of lost productivity as new agents take time to achieve the appropriate skills and reach the necessary productivity levels.

According to Galunic & Anderson (2000) cited in Kgomo & Swarts (2010), in today's competitive business environment, it is imperative that companies focus on employee retention, gaining commitment from their employees and managing employee turnover. Since labour costs represent approximately two-thirds of a call centre's operating costs (Taylor, 2010), the effect of a 'revolving door' of sales agents can have a marked effect on the business' performance.

In Taylor's (2002) research article *Focus on Talent*, he makes the point that staff attrition in contact centres is of utmost importance to managers in that industry, as high turnover is one of the most costly problems that companies face. Whilst it is difficult to provide a definitive rate of attrition for call centres in general, a prior observational study at Durcall suggests an annual agent turnover of about 155% - effectively turning over the equivalent of its entire agent staff compliment every 8 months. Kgomo & Swarts (2010) research on staff retention factors affecting contact centres in South Africa supports this and found that 85.12% of participants expressed an intention to leave the industry.

Such attrition has a significant adverse impact on call centres, primarily in the following areas:

- Higher recruitment and training costs – one calculation estimates the cost to a company of losing an employee at 25% of the employee's annual salary plus 25% of benefits offered (Amig & Jardine, 2001);
- The opportunity cost of 'lost' sales through inexperienced staff – it is estimated that it can take a new agent 6 months to attain the productivity of an experienced agent (Thornton, 2001);
- A negative impact on quality and compliance of an agent body with limited experience; and
- A knock-on effect to company culture, lower employee morale and disrupted customer relations (Kgomo & Swarts, 2010) resulting in a negative spiral of continued churn.

There exists, therefore, an important financial and business imperative to address the issue of staff attrition and this is analysed in the context of Durcall and its specific set of

circumstances as an outsource provider of outbound contact centre services. An important distinction is drawn in this research between the different types of call centres, as they are not all the same. Broadly speaking, a distinction can be made between captive centres, those run in-house by an organisation to service their own business needs, as opposed to outsource centres where an independent organisation is contracted to provide these services. A further significant distinction lies in the origination of the call, namely, inbound versus outbound. Inbound centres include customer service and technical enquires where agents field incoming calls, whilst outbound centres focus on phoning out, prime examples being telesales and telemarketing. This important distinction is not always highlighted in the literature on call centres but may have a marked effect on the outcomes and recommendations of the research.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The abovementioned background demonstrates, firstly, the financial imperative for companies engaged in the call centre industry to understand the motivators behind agents' intention to leave their employ.

Secondly, the research aims to add to the limited pool of research knowledge specific to outsourced outbound call centres as a distinct sub-set of the broader body of knowledge available on agent behaviour in call centres. In addition, it adds to the available academic literature specific to the local context. Unfortunately, the industry in South Africa is quite fractured and has no formal national or provincial industry body (in KwaZulu-Natal).

Thirdly, the research addresses the specific circumstances of Durcall, where the cost of staff turnover is of major operational concern and has the potential to significantly impact the company's performance and profitability.

### **1.4 Problem Statement**

The extent of staff turnover at Durcall is of such significance as to materially affect its profitability and ultimately the sustainability of its business. The purpose of this research was to examine employee attrition and the impact of specific contributors to staff turnover, focussing on the outbound contact centre environment at Durcall, specifically with a view

to providing suggestions to aide retention and thereby improve service, reduce training costs and to increase profits.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The study addresses the following specific objectives:

- Objective 1: To establish why agents apply for employment at Durcall.
- Objective 2: To examine what impact employee expectations at the recruitment stage have on staff turnover.
- Objective 3: To explore the impact of training, or the sufficiency thereof, on staff turnover.
- Objective 4: To examine what impact supervisor support has on staff turnover.
- Objective 5: To determine what impact peripheral factors such as transport, peer relationships, health and family responsibilities have on staff turnover.

### **1.6 Research Methodology Overview**

The research was quantitative in nature and utilised a cross-sectional study. The research tool utilised was a paper-based questionnaire consisting of 29 questions, primarily based on a 5-point Likert scale, where the final question was an open ended one allowing a qualitative response to add more depth to the respondents' feedback.

The questionnaire was developed based on the literature and from themes found in the company's existing exit interviews with staff, and the scope was narrowed based on a preliminary literature review. The questionnaire was designed to elicit responses pertinent to the objectives.

An initial pilot questionnaire was administered to 24 agents to review the appropriateness and validity of the proposed questions. For the study, the entire agent population was approached to complete questionnaires and this convenience sample resulted in 221 responses, an 82% response rate.

The data collected in the field was transcribed to an Excel worksheet and then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The services of a specialist data analyst were engaged for the processing of the data and the results are presented in Chapter Four.



## **1.7 Literature Review**

The literature search encompassed various sources including published books, academic journals, peer review papers and industry publications. The review defines the problem and provides background and context to the issues facing call centres generally and Durcall in particular. To this end data was mined from the company records and information gathered from internal documentation related to the problem. The review goes on to interrogate various past research as it relates to the defined objectives and critically analyses the problem statement and addresses each objective separately in the light of this research.

## **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The research was not intended as an in-depth analysis of all aspects of staff turnover in call centres but due to time and financial constraints was limited to only the five defined objectives. The study was further limited to the call centre operations of a single company in the Durban area. This then precludes any analysis of the differences that may occur between locations, particularly in terms of environmental considerations, staffing and other factors that may exist between sites and between different businesses. This limitation of responses from a single site will limit then the relevance of the research results to other organisations as the results may not be replicated.

There is an intrinsic limitation in the quantitative research performed due to a lack of depth in the responses but such a limitation was unavoidable as the adage that ‘time is money’ is particularly pertinent to telesales where time spent off the phones is productivity lost and access to agents in this regard was limited. A qualitative review of specific areas may have yielded greater insight into the reasons for particular behaviour.

Additionally, responses were obtained at an agent level as opposed to by team, that is, the sales environment is set up in teams of 10-12 but the questionnaire focused purely on individuals and as such is not able to offer specific insights into different teams and their team leaders (supervisors).

A further limitation was the sparse availability of literature specifically relating to outsourced outbound contact centres, and more generally to the limited academic and industry research literature on the call centre industry in South Africa due to its fractured nature.

Extensive use has been made of industry benchmark reports dating back to 2007. The South African Call Centre Industry Benchmark Report 2007, authored by Benner, Lewis & Omar, and The Global Call Centre Report 2007 by Hollman, Batt & Holtgrewe, were part of the same international study of call centre management and employment practices and represent the only comprehensive study on both a national and global basis of its kind. The only other well respected and researched publication on the industry is provided by Dimension Data's Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report but the costs of more up-to-date versions are prohibitive for this study (2013 version costing \$1,500).

Lastly, the reliability statistic returned by responses to the Fifth Objective (Cronbach Alpha of 0.474), relating to peripheral factors impacting call centre agents, did not meet the suggested minimum standard of reliability of 0.7 (UCLA, 2013). While these results might not be reliably replicated, they have been included for any insights they may offer Durcall in combating staff turnover.

## **1.9 Chapter Outline**

Chapter One is an overview of the perceived problem and the objectives of the research, with a brief discussion as to why the study is being undertaken and the methods employed in carrying it out.

Chapter Two contains a study of the literature relevant to the research topic comprising of published books, journals, peer review papers and industry publications that were consulted.

Chapter Three covers the research methodology employed and discusses both the theoretical underpinning of the research and the practical fieldwork undertaken.

Chapter Four presents the analysis or results of the research.

Chapter Five contains the discussion, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

## **1.10 Summary**

Staff turnover in the call centre industry, and at Durcall in particular, is an issue of such magnitude that it can severely impact its financial performance. As such, it warrants investigation to determine those factors that can materially affect its operations and offer recommendations to help address the issue.

To this end the research problem has been introduced and the motivation for it discussed along with the objectives that will seek to unpack the topic and add to the body of literature that exists. The significance of the study and benefit to the industry has been outlined. A research methodology appropriate to the nature of the study has been undertaken and the inevitable limitations have been highlighted.

Chapter two follows and reviews the relevant and contemporary literature consulted for this research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

---

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two reviews the literature pertaining to staff turnover in general, the significant influence it plays in outbound contact centres and its particular impact on Durcall as an organisation.

The focus of the review was on the literature and previous research conducted on staff attrition and intentions to quit as influenced by agents intentions and expectations at the time of joining, along with the impact of training and agent supervision. Particular practical or logistical issues: transport issues, peer relationships, health factors and family responsibilities, were also investigated and discussed critically in the light of existing research.

Forty-nine percent of contact centres rank staff retention as their number one Human Resource (HR) strategy driver, the highest of all contact centre HR strategy drivers (Dimension Data, 2007). Yet, despite retention being the number one HR strategy driver, it has the least defined and fewest or least specifically implemented HR policies to action it (Dimension Data, 2007, 2012).

Retaining employees is critical in today's business environment. Indeed, research conducted by Ernst & Young shows that "attracting and retaining employees are two of the eight most important issues investors take into account when judging the value of a company" (Michlitsch, 2000, p.30).

Such retention is also critical as employee turnover can significantly jeopardise an organisation's objectives as a consequence of the costs related to replacing employees and the hidden costs and consequences that occur as a result of such attrition (Abbasi & Holman, 2000, Kgomo & Swarts, 2010).

It is important however to understand this attrition and its causes in the context of the types of call centres that exist, the nature of staff turnover in the industry and the financial implication of the results.

## **2.2 Background to the Study**

The background provides an overview to the industry and its participants, explains in detail what staff turnover is and explores the cost implication of such attrition to justify the significance of such a study and provide context to the research that follows.

### **2.2.1 Types of Call Centres**

The distinction between call centres and contact centres is a minor one in the context of this research but worth noting. Call centres refer to those businesses whose sole or primary means of communication with their client or customer base is via the telephone. A contact centre by contrast supplements this telephonic communication with 'contact' via the internet, email or social media. These terms have been used interchangeably in this paper.

An overview of the type of call centres was provided in Chapter One, but the distinction cannot be overemphasised. Call centres can be broadly split into four groups: inbound (predominantly customer service centres) and outbound (telesales/telemarketing); and captives (in-house centres) and outsourced (subcontracted) centres.

"A full 81% are operated as in-house call centres, and the average size was 77 call centre agents" (Benner, Lewis & Omar, 2007, p.4) of which the majority in the South African survey conducted by the benchmarking report handle inbound calls (78%), typically responding to customer service requests or taking orders for products and services. "Only a minority of call centres (22%) are involved in outbound calling, marketing goods and services to new customers" (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.15).

Mahesh & Kasturi (2006, pp.136-137) put it succinctly when citing Taylor & Bain (2001) that "call centres are used by organisations in a wide variety of contexts, and therefore there are variations in call centre operations on a number of dimensions – from strategic purpose, to the nature of technology used, and finally to management style".

The 'strategic purpose' is significant - overall the findings of the Global Call Centre Report (Holman, Batt & Holtgrewe, 2007) suggests that subcontractors are more likely to specialise in outbound sales and telemarketing compared to in-house centres. The implication is that outsourcing carries with it natural risk for the principal, as they have little direct control over the quality of operations. "As a result, client firms often insist on vendor agreements that spell out in great detail the procedures to be used by subcontractors

to ensure quality control. This may result in clients closely monitoring the operations of subcontractors – and to an overall reduction in the discretion of both the managers and the agents in subcontractors” (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.24). This in turn can result in greater pressure on agents through increased monitoring and less discretion in job functions.

This reduction in discretion might also be the result of less complex functions being outsourced and would go some way to explaining the difference between in-house and outsourced call centres in training days. Benner *et al.*, (2007, p.5) found that local outsourcers averaged 17.4 initial training days for new hires as opposed to 26.5 days for in-house centres. This differential is comparable with global statistics where a typical contractor provides 14 days of initial training whilst the typical in-house centre provides 20 days (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.viii).

Holman *et al.* (2007, p.26) supports this by stating that it is a “fact that client firms typically outsource the more transactional, less complex work to subcontractors; and one indicator of job complexity is the time on the job it takes for a newly hired employee to be fully competent”. The survey found consistent and significant differences between the different call centre types and in almost all regions surveyed, with agents in subcontractors taking 14 weeks and in-house 20 weeks to reach full competency. This is comparable with the South African statistics of 12 and 18 weeks respectively (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.25).

Unfortunately, neither the South African nor Global benchmarks provide statistics on the differences between inbound and outbound centres. Dimension Data (2007, p.168) comes the closest in analysing by industry but concedes that “it is difficult to compare competency levels across sectors when the competencies in question are so different”.

These differences have a very real effect on an agent’s work experience and a direct bearing on staff turnover rates.

### **2.2.2 Staff Turnover Explained**

Staff turnover, occasionally referred to as staff attrition or churn, refers to the “change or movement of people in and out of an organisation” (Taylor, 2010, p.1). Attrition in a call centre more accurately refers to a total reduction in agent numbers but the terms have come to be used interchangeably in the industry; indeed Wieters (2007, p.7) defines attrition as

“the loss and subsequent need to rehire positions within an organisation”. For the purposes of this research, the terms have been used interchangeably.

Not all turnover however is negative. “Internal transfers occurred as both horizontal and vertical promotions. Employees utilising the opportunity for an internal transfer were viewed by management as positive turnover, when compared to negative turnover when people left the organisation altogether” (Borstorff & Marker, 2007, p.482). This research has touched on both areas of staff turnover but is primarily concerned with ‘negative turnover’.

It is difficult to provide a definitive turnover rate, primarily because most statistics don’t show the differing rates between inbound and outbound centres or fail to define what is included and excluded in ‘turnover’ or ‘attrition’. The most thorough attempt to determine a rate was produced as part of the Global Benchmarking survey in 2007, in which it referred to total turnover as “that resulting from all types of changes: quits, dismissals, promotions, and retirements” (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.36). It calculated this rate at 20% globally, but makes the point that rates vary from very low in coordinated countries (4% in Austria) to high rates in liberal market and recently industrialised countries (40% in India).

South Africa by comparison approximated this global turnover rate with a median of 21% when looking at all forms of turnover (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.5). Promotions and transfers accounted for roughly 5% of this total turnover, resulting in an annual average attrition rate (quits + dismissals + retirements) of 16% (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.5). Dimension Data’s (2007, p.173) global survey of the same year suggested an agent turnover rate of 24%.

Even at 24%, or 40% in the case of India, these rates appear low, particularly in the case of outsourced outbound centres, where monitoring is greater and the opportunity for job discretion limited. Holman *et al.* (2007, p.36) mentions that the “rates of turnover from the survey are lower than what is often reported anecdotally, and may reflect some conservative estimates in this regard”.

Kgomo & Swarts’ (2010) research supports the view that outbound centres are particularly hard hit. “The organisations with employees that indicate the highest intention to leave are telemarketing and health services, with 55.56%. As these organisations have to deal with outbound calls...This implies that outbound contact centres are faced with the serious problem of losing their staff and incurring the high costs of recruiting and training new staff members” (Kgomo & Swarts, 2010, p.244).

High turnover of staff has a knock on effect on staff tenure - a further measure of labour instability. “Research shows that inexperienced workers are less productive or less able to provide quality service because they do not have the knowledge of firm specific products and processes that more experienced workers have” (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.36). Here the research found that a third of call centre agents across the countries in the study had only one year of tenure or less, though this figure differed markedly between countries (10% in Austria and Sweden to almost 60% in India) (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.36). According to the South African report, the average tenure in a local subcontracted call centre was 3.6 years (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.21). Unfortunately no statistics were provided to distinguish between inbound and outbound call centres.

Such turnover is not uniform but has peaks and troughs; the graph that follows shows the survey results of peak attrition periods as provided by respondents in the Dimension Data (2012) Global Benchmarking Summary Report.

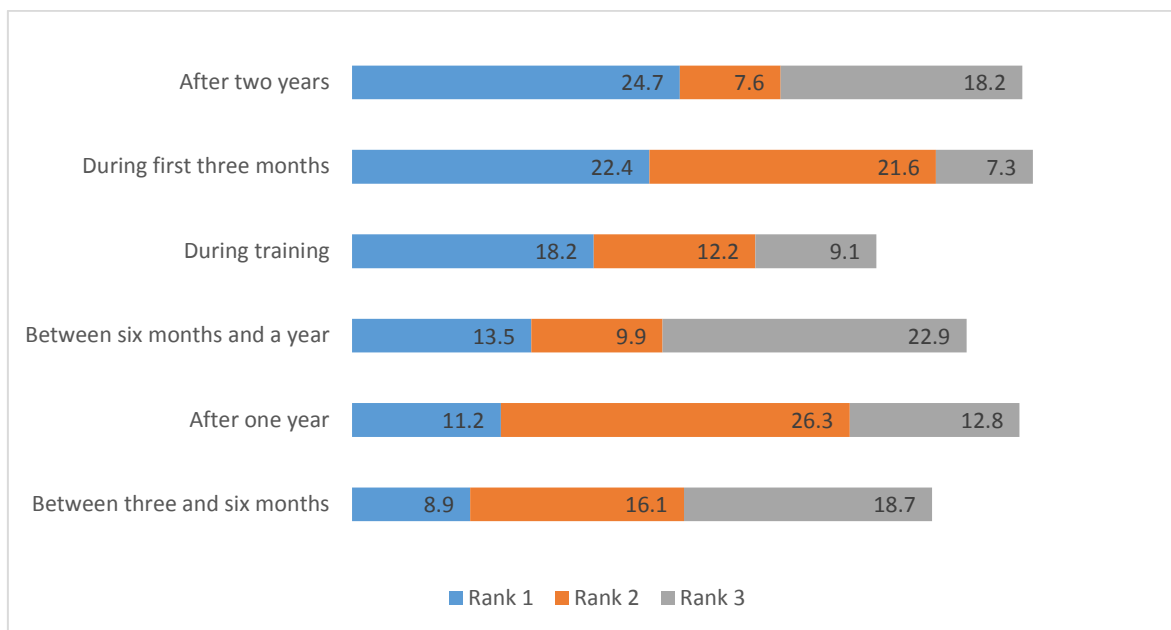


Figure 2.1 Peak attrition periods - At what periods do you find attrition to be at its highest? Reproduced from the Dimension Data (2012) Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Summary Report.

The figure represents the participating organisations responses to when they experienced the highest attrition according to the time scale (with only the three highest rankings shown for each period). This survey shows that 40.6% of respondents reported that their highest



attrition occurred within the first 3 months (inclusive of training), with 24.7% reflecting their peak attrition period after 2 years. Only a third of participants ranked attrition between these times as their peak attrition periods. The above study incorporates losses in training within the attrition statistics, but is unique in the literature reviewed as specifically disclosing the losses in training as attrition. Failure to accurately define attrition may result in inconsistent reporting of results. A review of the literature revealed differing approaches to reporting on attrition and in particular the exclusion of training statistics in some instances.

Lastly, it is important to note that these high levels of staff turnover are projected to continue into the future. In what Dimension Data (2007, p.26) refers to under the heading “Continued high attrition and a symptomatic approach to addressing people issues”, they state that “staff attrition is likely to remain at current or higher levels in the near term, driven partially by demands for increased wages and poor job satisfaction”. This is allied to the fact that “it has also been recognised that call centres often adopt a ‘sacrificial’ policy whereby they accept high levels of turnover in such high pressure environments” (Wallace, Eagleson & Waldersee, 2000, p.175).

The inevitable consequence of ongoing staff turnover is an impact on the financial performance of an organisation and these costs are explored in detail.

### **2.2.3 The Cost of Staff Turnover**

In addition to the operational disruption that staff turnover causes through declining productivity, lower staff morale and disrupted customer relations (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000) are the financial implications.

“Staff remain the single biggest investments; staff costs continue to form the lion’s share of contact centre operational budgets across regions – ranging from 64% to 74% of the total operational spend” (Dimension Data, 2007, p.16). This is supported by South African statistics where labour costs are reported to average 60% of total costs of operating a call centre (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.4) and averaged 65% globally (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.38).

Research literature offers a few estimates of the effects of staff turnover on operational costs. The Holman *et al.*, (2007) survey calculated the costs by asking managers to declare how much it cost them to recruit, screen, and train a typical new employee. By converting

the result into a percentage of the agents gross annual pay they were able to estimate that the cost of replacing an agent is equivalent to 16% of their annual salary or about 2 months pay. To this replacement cost, they added the cost of lost productivity. By applying an assumption of 50% productivity across the 12 weeks for an outsourced outbound agent to reach full competency, this equates to 1.5 months of pay (50% x 12 weeks) (adapted from the calculation in Holman *et al.*, 2007). Whilst the report concedes that the calculations are a rough estimate, they conclude that “the combined cost of recruitment and training plus lost productivity may be in the equivalent of three to four months pay of the typical call centre employee” (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.38). This estimate compares favourably with earlier work done by Thornton (2001, p.24), where he calculated that losing an agent or ‘hourly worker’ can cost a company as much as six months’ salary.

The calculation of the productivity cost perhaps represents a bias toward inbound/customer service centres and it is proffered that the productivity loss in a telesales environment would be more accurately represented by the opportunity cost of forgone revenue in utilising an underproductive agent rather than just being a function of agent salary and time. The true cost then is the difference in net revenue generated by a newer agent when compared to a fully productive agent.

When one extrapolates these costs and lost revenues out against a large agent body, the true magnitude of the situation can be felt. The financial impact alone warrants a move away from the ‘sacrificial’ HR policy highlighted by Wallace *et al.*, (2000), with the ancillary benefits of reducing the work load on managers who end up spending most of their time dealing with workforce churn (Holman *et al.*, 2007) and reducing the “loss of employee expertise and institutional knowledge” (Mitchell, Holton & Lee, 2001, cited in Kgomo & Swarts, 2010, p.231).

#### **2.2.4 South African Significance**

The issue of staff turnover in call centres is also of particular significance in South Africa as it has a direct bearing on the government’s development initiatives as laid out in the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA), its overarching economic development strategy (AsgiSA, 2011). The government targeted business process outsourcing as one of two sectors for particular attention because of the employment potential this industry offered and has provided significant assistance,

investment and incentives to promote the sector's growth (Benner *et al.*, 2007). The impact of turnover then would be an issue of concern for interested parties.

### **2.3 Experiences at Durcall**

Durcall is a Durban based outsource provider (subcontractor) of telesales services to the South African domestic market.

Use was made of in-house documentation, mining of existing data related to staff turnover from company records and through observation and discussion with Durcall's management. Use was also made of written exit interviews with agents on resignation to understand the contributing factors leading to their departure.

Staff turnover is of considerable concern because in the 12 month period from October 2012 to September 2013, the equivalent of 82% of new recruits exited the organisation. If calculated as the number of voluntary (e.g. promotion) and involuntary (e.g. resignation) losses over the average agent body during the year, that equates to 155% attrition (Durcall 1, 2013).

To replace lost agents, an extensive recruitment process is undertaken, commencing with print and social media advertising, employee referrals and a recruitment website to generate Curriculum Vitae (CV's). On average in a month for every 100 CV's processed, roughly 31 candidates will be invited for group or individual interviews of which only 18 will arrive for the interview. Only about 10 candidates will be successful after interviews and competency tests on literacy, numeracy and computer skills. Of these 10 candidates to whom offers are made only 7 actually commence work with the company. In total then, only 7.1% of applicants make it to employment or 23% of those whose CV's meet the minimum criteria (Durcall 2, 2013). In the past, use has also been made of various profiling or behavioural testing tools to help identify ideal candidates and reduce attrition, but with little noticeable benefit.

The next point of fall off for agents who have successfully negotiated the recruitment stage is in training. Durcall's internal training reports recorded that approximately 12% of new recruits left before completing their training and a further 17% failed the training itself (Durcall 3, 2013). That is, 29% of new recruits don't make it past the first 16 days of training.

The figure below shows, by month of service, when new agents left Durcall in their first year, with almost 46% leaving in the first month alone (including trainees).



Figure 2.2 Agent drop off percentage by month in the first year of service (Adapted from Durcall 4, 2013)

In addition to involuntary losses of new agents, a further 6% of the average agent workforce during the year were promoted to supervisors or took up positions in other areas of the company. The result is a significant effect on average agent tenure, with by far the majority of the agent body having been with the company for less than a year (Durcall 5, 2013).

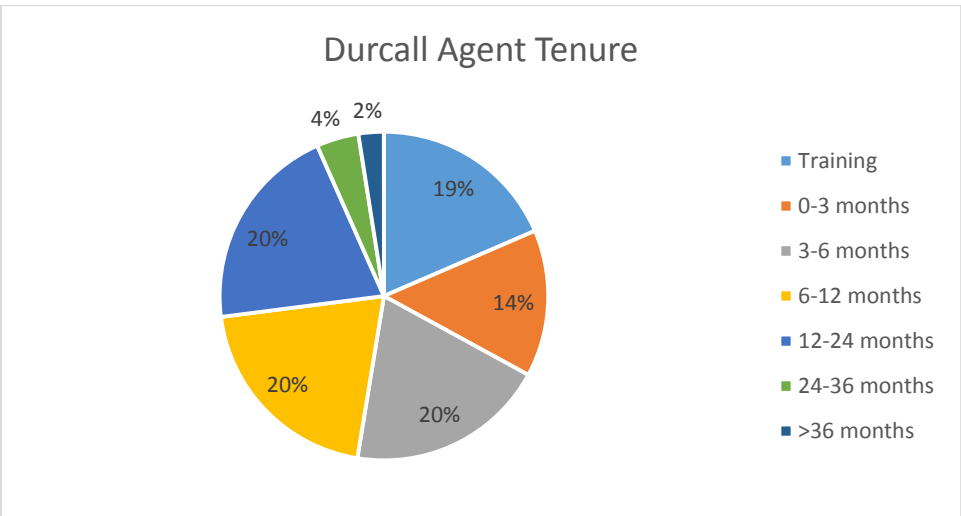


Figure 2.3 Tenure at Durcall (Adapted from Durcall 6, 2013)

The figure above reflects the fact that nearly 20% of Durcall's workforce at any point in time is made up of new agents in training and a further 34% have between 0 and 6 months experience in the live environment (out of training). In total, this represents an average employee tenure of just 11 months when excluding trainees and 9 months if trainees are included.

With this background to the nature and consequences of staff turnover and Durcall's circumstances in particular, the literature is reviewed further as it relates to the defined objectives.

## **2.4 Review of the Objectives**

The proceeding background offered some context to the environment in which call centre agents operate and the experiences of organisations, both globally and locally. Within this context, the literature is reviewed as it relates to call centre demographics and the objectives introduced in Chapter One.

### **2.4.1 Demographics**

#### **2.4.1.1 Age**

The best comparison of age distribution comes from BPeSA Western Cape's statistics on call centres within its ambit and they report the following age breakdown for 2011/2012 (BPeSA Western Cape, 2013, p.26):

- 18-25 years represent 48.8%,
- 26-30 years makes up 42.1%, and
- 31+ years just 9.1%.

Budwar, Varma, Malhorta & Mukherjee (2009, p.353) comment on the experiences of the growing Indian call centre industry and its predominance of under-30 age group employees that "get carried away by complacency and an insouciance that is representative of their age group".

#### **2.4.1.2 Gender**

The gender distribution of call centre agents reported in South Africa is 57% female and 43% male (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.18). This distribution in favour of women is perhaps even more significant than this statistic suggests and the global figure of 69% (Holman *et al.*, 2007) is more in line with Durcall's experiences. Belt, Richardson & Webster (2002), cited in Kgomo & Swarts (2010), found that contact centres admitted to recruiting women on the assumption that they are better at performing emotional functions. In the Holman *et al.*, (2007) survey, some of the assumptions given by managers for the bias was that women have a non-threatening customer service demeanour and that there are cultural assumptions that women can be trusted and have good keyboarding skills.

#### **2.4.1.3 Race**

Call centres reflect the bias in demographic patterns in the different regions of South Africa, which is borne out by the statistical figures presented by Benner *et al.*, (2007, p.17), where Coloureds represented 9% of the population but 35% of the national agent workforce surveyed, and Indians 2% of the population and 11% of the agent body. This is indicative of the distribution of call centres in some locales where population groups are disproportionately represented, such as Cape Town and Durban.

#### **2.4.1.4 Dependants**

Prior analysis of written exit interviews conducted with agents leaving Durcall suggested that relationship issues, within and outside the call centre, along with family responsibilities, resulted in a number of agents leaving the company.

#### **2.4.1.5 Education**

Locally "in the vast majority (84%) of call centres, core agents typically have a matric or school-leaving certificate. In only 3% of call centres did core employees typically have less than a matric. In 13% of call centres, typical core employees had more than a matric or school-leaving certificate — either a technical degree or certificate, or a University degree" (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.4). Globally, of those surveyed, only Brazil reported a lower rate of hiring degreed employees and the world average was a 22% reliance on college graduates (Holman *et al.*, 2007).

The South African report makes the comment that locally “the image of call centre work being low-skilled clerical work is not in line with much of the industry” (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p. 44). Such an image may play an important part in an agent’s view of call centres not being a potential career option.

#### **2.4.1.6 Tenure**

Dimension Data (2012) showed that 40.6% of surveyed organisations felt that the first 3 months (including training) were their peak attrition months, declining to 13.5% over the next 6 months, which shows the difference time makes. The literature on the time taken to reach full competency – 12 weeks (or 3 months) (Holman *et al.*, 2007) would seem to support the conclusion that these initial months are critical. Sadien (2010) reaches the conclusion in her research work that coping with emotional labour is also impacted significantly through length of service. Sadien (2010, p.71) cites van der Merwe & Miller (1988, p.75) that “separation is more likely to occur in the early weeks of employment when there is little to hold the new entrant to the working group”. This research highlights the critical importance of the initial few months for an employee, after which Benner *et al.*, (2007, p.21) report that the average agent tenure in a subcontracted call centre is 3.6 years (and 2.9 in captive call centres). This average is significantly higher than the 11 months reported by Durcall for agents out of training, or 9 months if including those in training. This may point to a significant problem within Durcall or in the representation of statistics on the subject, or both, and is addressed in Chapters Four and Five based on the empirical results.

#### **2.4.1.7 Experience**

The impact of experience on agent turnover can be a double-edged sword. Townsend’s (2007) qualitative study discussed the issue of an endless cycle of recruiting because the best agents found careers elsewhere in the organisation and the worst would leave. The study by Budwar *et al.*, (2009) reinforces the point that agents were looking for high growth opportunities, higher salaries and better work environments. Recruiting experience might reduce the time to full competency but the transience indicated by the turnover statistics suggests that such a policy may not be sustainable.

Townsend (2007) draws on past research, citing Nickson, Warhurst, Witz & Cullen, (2001) when suggesting that attitude or personality might be preferable to experience, training and

technical skills. He further cites Callaghan & Thompson (2002) “we recruit attitude” and Townsend (2005) “if they are willing to learn they are better to employ” and concludes with Blyton & Turnbull’s (1998) suggestion that the easiest way to develop a compliant workforce is to recruit one (Townsend, 2007, p.478).

## **2.4.2 To Establish Why Agents Apply for a Job at Durcall**

Agents’ motivations at the time of joining were sought in order to determine if there were any early warning indicators as to different agents’ propensities to stay in Durcall’s employ based on their circumstances, prior behaviour and career outlook.

### **2.4.2.1 Previously Unemployed**

Hasluck (2011) suggests that whilst employers often perceived that employing unemployed people imposed additional costs, there may be productivity gains from the goodwill of those given an opportunity and that their loyalty may result in reduced turnover.

### **2.4.2.2 Ease of Entry into Call Centres**

As a mass employer, the structures at Durcall are set up to facilitate ease of access into the business. Holman *et al.*, (2007) makes the point that mass market call centres are less selective in who they hire and typically on-board one-in-four candidates. The situation at Durcall is slightly different in that candidates are subject to extensive screening processes. A candidate may be subject to a CV check, telephone screening, an interview, skills tests (numeracy and literacy) and needs to pass external credit and criminal record checks and verification of qualifications. This, together with client and legislative requirements, results in a success ratio of only one-in-ten applicants.

The fact remains though that with turnover rates of 155%, the company is having to offer a number of employment opportunities each month just to match the attrition. Whilst no statistics are available for the growth of call centres in Durban, the rapid expansion is clearly evident, with the consequence that there is intense competition for experienced agents and a need for a bigger pool of agent talent – the inference being that there is more demand than supply of adequately skilled agents in the industry in Durban (City Hall BPO Meeting, 2013).



#### **2.4.2.3 Call Centres as a Career**

Both Budwar *et al.*, (2009) and Townsend (2007) point to the transience of call centre agents and the fact that for an agent, work in a call centre may appear as a stop gap or a temporary measure as they seek better career prospects elsewhere. McDonnell, Connell, Hannif, & Burgess' (2013) research refers to such notions when citing Taylor & Bain (1999) and Stanworth's (2000) results that suggest call centres are 'careerless' and that significant proportions of staff never moved beyond entry-level positions.

Research by McDonnell *et al.*, (2013) however points to the fact that perceptions of promotion and career advancement differ between team leaders/supervisors and agents in that "93 per cent of TLs [Team Leaders or Supervisors] considered that there were promotional opportunities in their respective call centre compared with 66 per cent of CCOs [Call Centre Operators or agents], and 89 per cent of TLs intended to develop a career in the call centres compared with 63 per cent of CCOs" (McDonnell *et al.*, 2013, p.157).

#### **2.4.2.4 Moving for Better Prospects**

The literature above, particularly Budwar *et al.*, (2009) and themes found in Townsend's (2007) case study, support the notion that agents readily move on the notion of better prospects at the next employer. The consequence is high churn between call centres and this is borne out in Durcall's own circumstances where its recruitment processes favour agents whose previous work experience is the same or similar to that required in the company.

### **2.4.3 The Impact of Employee Expectations at Recruitment Stage on Staff Turnover**

Townsend (2007) states that, despite the large volume of literature on many aspects of the growing call centre industry, there has been little attention paid to recruitment and training in particular. Understanding an agent's expectations may, however, guide management interventions to address this aspect.

#### **2.4.3.1 Understanding the Nature of the Work**

The results of Grebennikov & Shah's (2012) research into attrition trends on university students, offers an insight into the issue of ensuring that candidates understand what the work entails. It was their recommendation that sufficient, correct and clear information was the appropriate solution to the biggest single contributor to attrition – the candidate not knowing what they were getting into.

A lesson can be taken from this study and the potential benefits of complete and relevant information, particularly where agents have no previous telesales experience. Townsend (2007) makes the comment that, regardless of the type of call centre, agents will be required to perform high levels of emotional labour. This emotional labour is amplified when experienced in conjunction with the increased monitoring and lack of discretion indicative of outsource call centres as discussed under the heading "Background" in chapter one.

#### **2.4.3.2 Company Commitments**

In addition to the agent having an understanding of the role, there is the issue of the organisation's cultural values. Borstorff & Marker (2007) cite Sheridan's (1992) research which indicated that such values have an effect on all interactions with employees and referred to 'other researchers' who had argued that employees were attracted to organisations where there was a fit, and when they did not fit they would leave. Borstorff & Marker (2007) went further to suggest that where pay and benefits are an expectation, a company's culture may be the deciding factor in an employee's decision to stay or go. Living up to initial commitments would be a cornerstone of expressing a company's values, particularly when it's competing with common perceptions of being a 'sweatshop' or similar.

#### **2.4.3.3 Requisite Skills**

Mention has been made of the 'sacrificial' approach to employment (Wallace *et al.*, 2000) that many call centres have by simply attracting large numbers of agents and attempting to train job-centred technical skills. Breugh & Starke (2000) however question the efficacy of this approach and have rather suggested that 'post-hire' issues of job satisfaction and initial job performance are more important. Townsend (2007) expands on this by suggesting that organisations should seek to "match an applicant's adaptability, teamwork

skills, self-confidence, and degree of optimism to the existing organisational culture” (Townsend, 2007, p.477-478). This supports the more people-oriented approach of seeking out the right attitude and fit to the organisation than simply the skills for the job promoted by Callaghan & Thompson (2002).

Such a people-oriented approach gains further importance when considering that “many studies have found call-centre work to be physically and emotionally intensive with performance pressure, close surveillance and limited autonomy” (Bohle, Willaby, Quinlan & McNamara, 2010, p.219). Townsend (2007) however concedes that it is something of a balancing act in that it is as important to find people with the attitude and values that fit with the organisation as it is to have the more tangible abilities to communicate with customers and operate with the technologies that their job requires.

It is because of these competing skill requirements that behavioural assessment tools are gaining in popularity (Wieters, 2007) as a means to supplement technical testing with attitudinal or behavioural insights.

#### **2.4.3.4 Work Environment**

Budhwar *et al.*, (2009, p.353) use the example of a 20-something youth who quit his job “on the grounds that the canteen in the office was not good” to illustrate the point that employees in call centre work are transitory. The importance of the environment then cannot be understated in an industry where churn between centres is so high. Lewig & Dollard (2003) reinforce the point that, as the demand for staff grows, it is the call centres that provide a healthy work environment that will attract and retain the best talent.

#### **2.4.4 The Impact of Training, or Sufficiency thereof, on Staff Turnover**

Post recruitment, the agents’ first impressions of the organisation are through their training. Durcall’s statistics on losses during this period suggest it is an area that requires focus.

##### **2.4.4.1 Sufficiency of Upfront Training**

The average time devoted to up-front or induction training in industrialising economies is 17 days as compared to 14 days in co-ordinated economies (Holman *et al.*, 2007, p.vii). In South Africa, the average is 17.4 days of initial training for new hires in subcontracted

centres (Benner *et al.*, 2007, p.24) which is not significantly different to the 16 days allocated in Durcall.

Borstorff & Marker (2007) explains that these abridged training times in call centres are a consequence of the high turnover rates which require that new recruits be inducted in a manner that gets them operational in the shortest possible time lines.

The training processes at Durcall is split into two phases, the first is class room based and focuses on product and systems knowledge, with a portion of the time allocated to sales skills and role-play, and the second to supervised live dialling to assess competence. The majority of the focus is on technical competence and less on the softer skills. Borstorff & Marker (2007) makes the point that it's surprising in an industry where emotional labour is a well-recognised fact, that little or no effort is given to developing the skills to handle this.

Townsend (2007), however, makes the comment that in the circumstances of his case study, the cost and time required for additional emotional labour training might not benefit the organisation. In such a case, he argues that focusing on recruiting 'emotion-ready' candidates and offering the opportunity of internal career growth, may be a more effective approach.

#### **2.4.4.2 Coaching**

The development and enhancement of skills post initial training is performed through coaching. The difference between agent and organisational perceptions of the intention with regard to coaching may be a contributing factor to staff turnover. Townsend (2007) states that there is a dispute over whether management's monitoring of agent/customer interactions and subsequent feedback, are a form of control or skills development. There would appear to be support for such a concern as respondents in the 2007 Global Call Centre Report confirm that performance monitoring is frequently perceived as a source of stress and anxiety, whereas management overwhelmingly see it as a tool to identify training gaps and enhance performance (Holman *et al.*, 2007).

If it is indeed a perception, the opportunity exists to improve the manner or nature of coaching to highlight the performance benefits rather than it being a source of anxiety.

#### **2.4.4.3 Coping With Stress**

Much has been made of the emotional labour that is inherent in call centre work and Goodwin, Groth & Fenkel (2011, p.541) cite Grady (2000) in stating that agents “who regularly engage in emotional labour may develop the attitude that they are in an unsuitable work environment, which might ultimately compel them to leave the organisation”. It stands to reason that agents require the skill set or support to be able to handle such a job. The potential cost of additional training may be prohibitive as Townsend (2007) postulates but Mahesh & Kasturi (2006) suggest more operational methods of avoiding rather than coping with stress, such as training specifically to deal with difficult customers and balancing the view that agents have of customers by sharing not just the negative stories but positives too.

#### **2.4.4.4 Organisational Commitment**

The time and investment in training requires a return in performance for there to be a benefit to an organisation. Brum (2007) concludes in his research that training that looks to improve employee investment enhances employee’s commitment to the company. This supports the belief that there is a correlation between training and organisational commitment and consequentially tenure. Owens (2006) study produced similar results in finding support for the hypothesis that employees in training show greater commitment and are less likely to consider quitting. Brum (2007) moderates the commitment link by adding that the link is more effective when training coincides with other human resources policies focused on commitment and cites Green, Felsted, Mayhew & Pack (2000) in writing that linking training to employee appraisals and compensation plans has shown to further enhance employee commitment.

#### **2.4.5 The Impact of Supervisor Support on Staff Turnover**

The literature is quite clear that the management of the call centre and particularly the effectiveness of supervisors are likely to be primary factors in shaping the agents perceptions of the work environment (McDonnell *et al.*, 2013, pp.146-147). Borstorff & Marker (2007) cite Dobbs (2001) in support of the importance of the supervisor and the conclusion that the length of an employee’s tenure was determined largely by their relationship with their manager.

Such findings are corroborated in the research of Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vanderberghe, Sucharski & Roades (2002) who found that supervisor support correlated with employees' intent to stay. Such supervision is a many and varied task, and is explored collectively as supervisor skills, support and management of an agent's stress, which are interrelated.

#### **2.4.5.1 Supervisor Skills and Support**

The supervisor plays a pivotal role as the organisation's conduit to the agent. The kind of skills required are suggested by Taylor (2002) – employees look up to someone they can trust, who makes an effort to understand them and who treats them fairly. Supervisor support also acts as a tool to shield agents from the negative effects of the job demands that are inherent in call centre work (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). The converse occurs where such support is not forthcoming, stress levels increase and results in reduced job satisfaction (Siong, Mellor, Moore & Firth, 2006).

Borstorff & Marker (2007) cite Tepper (2000), whose findings were that agents who found supervisors to be abusive exhibited less favourable attitudes to work, life and the organisation, with negative consequences in their family life. Borstorff & Marker (2007, p.17) go on to cite Dixon-Kheir (2005) on the particularly important role a supervisor plays in a diverse workforce by “bonding young (age 21-30) and culturally diverse...employees to their organizations”, which resonates with Durcall's particular circumstances.

McDonnell *et al.*, (2013, p.147) cite Harney & Jordan (2008) on the immediacy and importance of the supervisor's interventions with agents in the form of line management responsibility for Human Resource Management issues given the constant and immediate interaction between agents and customers.

Work by Deery, Iverson & Walsh (2002) also found that a supportive and concerned supervisor not only had a positive influence on employee well-being but contributed to a favourable disposition on the part of agents toward career opportunities and nullified some of the negative effects of performance monitoring. This is an important factor given the considerable monitoring that occurs particularly in outsourced call centres (Benner *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, Hirschfeld (1979) cited in Deery, Iverson & Walsh (2002) has concluded that one of the most likely outcomes of regular emotional labour is job-related burnout, which could be minimised with appropriate supervision.

Supervisors are also viewed as the intermediary between agents and management and the method by which agents can raise their issues and concerns (McDonnell *et al.*, 2013). Lastly, the McDonnell *et al.*, (2013) research reflected the consistent theme of the supervisor as coach and trainer.

Support offered by supervisors is therefore critical and has a direct bearing on an agent's work commitment and job satisfaction and ultimately on an agent's intentions to quit (Siong *et al.*, 2006, p.239).

#### **2.4.5.2 Supervisors' Organisational Status**

There is an important link between the agents' view of their supervisor and the organisation. Eisenberger *et al.*, (2002, p.566) make the statement that "(s)upervisors who appear to be highly valued and well treated by the organisation would be highly identified with the organisation's basic character and would therefore strongly influence POS (Perceived Organisational Status)". Their research goes on to make the point that, because the supervisor is a primary agent of the organisation in directing their day-to-day activities, there is a direct relationship between agents' perceptions of the organisation and the supervisor based on the agents' favourable or unfavourable interactions with that supervisor (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002).

This research demonstrates clearly that the supervisor and the organisation are largely indistinguishable in the agents' eyes – they assess the supervisor by the value the organisation attributes to the supervisor and assess the organisation by the way the supervisor treats them.

#### **2.4.6 The Impact of Peripheral Factors on Staff Turnover: Transport, Peer Relationships, Health and Family Responsibilities**

A preliminary review of Durcall's written exit interviews revealed certain additional themes and these were reviewed as peripheral factors for their potential impact on staff turnover.

##### **2.4.6.1 Peer Relationships**

The dynamics of a relatively young, entry level, workforce in a high intensity environment that is staff intensive has the potential for conflict between co-workers. Visser & Rothmann (2009, p.97) however found that, although such co-worker hassles did reflect a correlation with exhaustion, it failed to be classed as a significant contributor to exhaustion in their regression model. Interestingly, the qualitative feedback from Visser & Rothmann's (2009) discussions with agents revealed that a perceived lack of cooperation and assistance from support departments impacted heavily on their motivation levels as issues of accountability and finger pointing caused friction between the departments.

#### **2.4.6.2 Transport Concerns**

The practical problem of getting to and from work is a real issue for many staff and is highlighted as an area of concern in the BPeSA Western Cape (2013) Key Indicator Report. The Report noted in particular the issue of night shifts and revealed an increasing trend of companies contributing toward paying for late shift transport. No such statistics are available for Durban call centres.

Visser & Rothman (2009) look beyond the simple logistics of staff availability and cost and comment that the use of public transport itself carries with it the stresses of overcrowding, travel delays and potential victimisation. This is of particular relevance to the facility under review as it exists on an under-developed public transport route making access more difficult than other potential sites.

#### **2.4.6.3 Family/Relationship Issues**

Prior observations and a review of exit interviews at Durcall had revealed a number of departures for personal or family reasons. One potential contributing factor is a work-life conflict that can be the result of poor supervision (Tepper, 2000, cited in Borstorff & Marker, 2007); the exhaustion prevalent in call centre work (Visser & Rothman, 2009) or the "concentration of work at socially undesirable times" (Bohle *et al.*, 2010, p.219). The issue however is much broader and work circumstances may be only one of a myriad of factors impacting on an agent's domestic situation but it is important to quantify the potential magnitude of the problem.



#### **2.4.6.4 Health Issues**

Hochschild (1979) cited in Sadien (2010) believed that employees risked high levels of stress where their work required sustained customer contact and limited opportunity to vary their work. Kinman (2009) cites Grandey *et al.*, (2004) and Korczynski (2003) on the fact that call centre staff are frequently the object of hostility and abuse from customers but are expected to remain calm at all times. Added to this are high performance targets which result in intensive client loads and interactions with little or no down time, resulting in an exhaustion of an individual's energy levels (Maslach *et al.*, 2001 cited in Visser & Rothmann, 2009).

Holman (2003) points out that not attending to these negative influences on an agent's well-being may increase the incidence of absenteeism and staff turnover or lead to burnout.

## **2.5 Summary**

The literature reviewed provided a background to the issue of staff turnover, both globally and locally, and discussed the types of call centres, the nature of staff turnover and the financial consequences of the problem. With this foundation, Durcall's particular circumstances were discussed and related to the literature specific to the objectives. The literature explored the direct effects of staff attitudes and motivations in seeking employment with Durcall, it considered the impact of recruitment, training and supervisors on agents intentions to leave and lastly looked at particular observed concerns related to relationships in and out the office, health issues and staff transport.

The research methodology utilised for this study is discussed in Chapter Three which follows.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter various forms of research methodology are discussed as are the population, the sample size, questionnaire construction and pilot study. In addition, the data collection process, as well as validity and reliability aspects of the research, are presented. The fieldwork process is discussed in detail, followed by the ethical issues which were addressed.

The chapter sets out the rationale for the selected research design and discusses in detail the reasons and relevance of a primarily quantitative methodological approach to the study. It also motivates for the inclusion of a qualitative element to the research on the basis that it enriches the study.

#### **3.2 Quantitative Methodology**

Bryman & Bell (2007, p.154) describe quantitative research in broad terms as “entailing the collection of numerical data and as exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive, a predilection for a natural science approach...and as having an objectivist conception of social reality”. That is, a methodology that has been adopted from the physical sciences and suggests that a hypothesis can be deduced from the theory and subjected to testing. The methodology is designed to produce quantifiable, reliable data that are usually generalisable to some larger population.

The main preoccupations of quantitative analysis then are (1) measurement: an ability to quantify the issue under review; (2) causality: not merely describing a situation but attempting to explain it by examining its causes, that is, to infer from an independent and dependant variables that one causes the other; (3) generalisation: that findings can be generalised beyond the immediate context of the research, primarily through probability sampling; and (4) replication: the ability to be able to reproduce experiments as a means to overcome the potential for bias and subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Most criticism of quantitative research stems from “treating the social world as if it were no different from the natural order” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.174) and ignoring the fact that people interpret the world around them. To this can be added the relative weakness in depth of understanding presented when compared to the qualitative claim that their contextual approach presents the meaning of people’s actions and not just the behaviour (Collis, 2009).

### **3.3 Qualitative Methodology**

By comparison, qualitative research tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers (Collis, 2009). The methodology is more intent on the generation of theories rather than the testing of theories that are specified at the outset (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As a result, the epistemological view is one that places emphasis on understanding the social world “through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.402). That is, a research process that seeks to understand a participant’s view of a situation within their natural setting or context to deliver what Bryman & Bell (2007, p.426) refer to as “rich, deep data”.

### **3.4 Mixed Methods Research**

Mixed methods research combines quantitative and qualitative research. Whilst there is debate over whether the two methodologies can be combined and there is an argument that they are separate paradigms and carry epistemological commitments, it is none-the-less the situation that “the amount of combined research has been increasing since the early 1980’s” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.642).

Hammersley (1996) cited in Bryman & Bell (2007) proposes three approaches to mixed method research: Triangulation, Facilitation and Complementarity. The first is used to corroborate findings between the research types, the second to aide one research strategy using the other strategy and lastly, when the two strategies are that different, aspects of the investigation can be aligned.

Given the growing preparedness to accept the technical view of research methods as techniques of data collection and analysis and not restricted by epistemological and ontological concerns (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and Cooper & Schindler’s (2006) view that

multi-method research can secure a greater insight than the more traditional single method research, this has guided the decision on the adopted methodology.

### **3.5 The Adopted Methodology**

This research was conducted using a primarily quantitative methodology. Although use was made of one open-ended question to elicit more insight into the responses, the remaining 28 questions were quantitative in nature. The rationale behind the methodology was to quantify the influence of the various contributing factors on employee's intentions to stay or leave the organisation.

Prior observation and discussions with management and supervisors had highlighted a number of concern areas but this, along with the exit interviews that are performed on a voluntary basis, gave only anecdotal or indicative support for a focus on the identified problems.

By using a quantitative methodology, the research is able to quantify the broad extent of the problem and identify the more widespread issues with a view to finding solutions or motivating for a more in-depth analysis. The nature of call centres as a 'mass market' employer made a number based approach that much more applicable.

### **3.6 Population**

Bryman & Bell (2007, p.182) define a population as "the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected". The target population for the research was Durcall's entire body of sales agents who had passed through their recruitment and induction training phase, a total or population size of 270 agents. It was considered necessary to exclude trainees as their limited time in the organisation would have precluded them from being able to respond to all the questions posed by the research instrument. Cognisance was also taken of the potential absenteeism on any given day and the impact this might have on the available pool of respondents.

### **3.7 Sample Size**

Sampling, a subset of the population selected for investigation, can be divided into two types: probability (representative) sampling and non-probability (judgemental) sampling (Collis, 2009). The benefit of probability sampling is that it allows the researcher to employ tests of statistical significance, and thereby enables inferences to be drawn with greater accuracy as it “stands a better chance of keeping sampling error in check” (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This is because every unit in the population stands an equal chance of being selected. Non-probability sampling by contrast is not statistically representative and runs the risk of bias.

The entire population was chosen as the targeted sample, in effect a census, rather than a statistical subset as “the larger the sample size the greater the precision (because the amount of sampling error will be less)” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.195). Should a Sample Table have been used, a population of 250 at a 95% confidence level and 5% Margin of Error would have suggested a sample size of 152 agents (The Research Advisors, 2006). On the basis of Bryman & Bell’s (2007) suggestion that a larger sample offers greater precision, the statistical significance of probability sampling was forgone for the greater precision of size.

### **3.8 Validity**

“Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.41). Bryman & Bell (2007) distinguish between four major types of validity: measurement, internal, external and ecological validity. Internal validity is concerned with whether a conclusion regarding a causal relationship is defensible. By comparison, external validity “is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study can be generalised beyond the specific research context” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.42). Ecological validity by contrast deals with the issue of whether technically valid research findings have any relationship to what people experience in their everyday lives (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The fourth type, measurement validity, which applies primarily to quantitative research, can be further divided between face, concurrent, predictive, construct and convergent validity. This measurement validity “refers to the issue of whether or not an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures the concept” (Bryman

& Bell, 2007, p.65). That is, it refers to the extent to which a test actually measures what it was intended to measure.

Construct validity attempts to identify the underlying constructs being measured and determines how well the test represents them (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2005). Such validity is evidenced by factor analysis that seeks to relate the questionnaire to the literature that served as its basis.

Face validity was tested by having a panel of six people assess the draft questionnaire for such validity. The panel consisted of subset of the call centre population, two academics and a statistician. The panel were asked to consider specific statements against the related objectives. The panel members were satisfied that the statements were related to the set objectives and as such face validity was established, though a few panel members thought it would be worth revising several statements for ease of comprehension. A subsequent pilot study confirmed this and is elaborated on below.

### **3.9 Reliability**

“Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.40) or put differently, a measure is reliable to the degree that it supplies consistent results (Blumberg *et al.*, 2005).

Reliability is concerned with three prominent factors: (1) stability: determining whether or not a measure is stable over time; (2) internal reliability: whether or not respondents’ scores on any one indicator are consistent with their scores on other indicators; and (3) inter-observer consistence: where more than one observer is involved there exists the possibility of inconsistency between their submissions.

Blumberg *et al.*, (2005) highlight three reliability estimates, namely, Test-retest, Parallel forms and Cronbach’s Alpha. Test-retest involves administering the test on one occasion and re-administering the test to the same sample after an interval of time. Parallel forms measure the degree to which alternative forms of the same measure produce the same or similar results. Cronbach’s Alpha, the internal reliability measure used in the research, “calculates the average of all possible split-half reliability coefficients” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.164). More simply, it measures the degree to which instrument items are similar or comparable and reflect the same underlying constructs (Blumberg *et al.*, 2005).

A Cronbach Alpha coefficient of greater than 0.7 affords the researcher confidence as to the internal consistency of the analysed items or statements and measured evidence of an underlying construct (UCLA, 2013).

The internal reliability test for this research generated a 0.810 coefficient across the 21 non-demographic questions in the questionnaire which indicates the relative reliability of the results and meets the requirement of being replicable.

Table 3.1: Cronbach Alpha Result

Reliability Statistic	
Cronbach's Alpha	<b>0.810</b>

### 3.10 Questionnaire Construction

The questionnaire was largely based on prior research at Durcall. This was developed from an observational study, a review of internal documentation (including exit interviews and data mining of recruitment, training and HR statistics) and a review of the literature specific to the themes covered by the objectives.

A 5-point Likert scale was decided on as an easily understood and appropriate test to gauge people's attitudes towards questions. It is a favoured approach to investigating a cluster of attitudes as the scale allows for a response at either extreme, a neutral third and a further two for more moderate or conditional responses (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2006).

The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions, of which 28 were quantitative in nature with one qualitative, open-ended question. The structure of the questionnaire dealt with the five defined objectives, with four or five questions under each heading and an initial set of seven demographic questions.

Scale points were allocated using numbers to represent the categories. For nominal data random numbers were used to represent unrelated categories, for example, in capturing the responses related to age: 1="18-24" year olds, 2="25-34", 3="35-49" and 4="50+". With ordinal data where a degree of ranking exists the Likert scale was coded thus: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree.

A single open ended question was included at the end of the questionnaire to allow respondents to raise any other issues that they felt hadn't been addressed or give greater insight to their personal experiences.

### **3.11 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the research being performed and to identify any weaknesses in the overall composition of the study. The pilot was conducted with the assistance of 24 sales agents and 2 supervisors at Durcall to assess the ease of understanding of the questionnaire, to identify any ambiguity and as a test run to determine the best approach to the distribution of the questionnaire and compilation of the results. It also helped determine if there was a need for the test to be distributed electronically.

Lastly, the data collected from the pilot was submitted to a professional data analyst for advice on any weaknesses in the questionnaire and to obtain a provisional Cronbach's Alpha score as an indication of the likely reliability outcome.

As a result of the pilot:

- an error was picked up in the biographical questions and corrected;
- minor adjustments were made to certain questions in a few instances to avoid vagueness and in one instance to aide understanding;
- questions related to one objective were redrafted for greater reliability;
- it was decided that distribution by electronic survey was not required as paper-based responses were simple to distribute in a captive setting and easily transcribed to an Excel worksheet; and
- it was decided to use volunteer staff from outside of the immediate Sales environment to distribute the questionnaires to further reduce any concerns around the confidentiality of responses.

A review of the altered questionnaire was conducted with an available group of 7 agents from the original pilot study to determine whether the improvements to the questions themselves helped comprehension, and the test was successful. All defective issues were addressed prior to the Ethical Clearance submission.



### **3.12 Ethical Issues**

Prior to the questionnaire being administered, all participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the research and it was highlighted that it was purely voluntary. As such, participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time and without any negative consequence as a result of the withdrawal. Respondents were advised that their submissions would remain private and confidential, and were to be used for the purpose of personal studies with no disclosure of any sort to the employer, Durcall, or its management.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's standard questionnaire covering pages were customised and presented with each questionnaire. A Questionnaire Cover Page 3B (Appendix 1) and Informed Consent Letter 3C were utilised, one page retained by the respondent and the other signed and returned (Appendix 2). The Questionnaire has been attached as Appendix 3.

No incentives were offered to respondents for participation in the survey.

A Gatekeepers Consent Letter to conduct research within the organisation was obtained.

Ethical clearance to conduct this research was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal prior to commencing (Appendix 4).

### **3.13 Data Collection Process**

The data was collected via a paper-based questionnaire distributed to all sales agents within the sample who were at Durcall's offices on the day of the survey.

The distribution of the questionnaire was done with the assistance of volunteer staff from inside the company but not related to the Sales department housing the respondents, to enhance anonymity and confidentiality. These volunteers were advised as to the purpose of the research along with the importance of adhering to the ethical requirements of academic research and the particular requirements of the University. A finite number of questionnaires were printed out on the basis of Durcall's Human Resource Department's calculation of the number of sales agents employed and who had passed training. These questionnaires were numbered for completeness so as to track responses. Each questionnaire pack contained a covering letter explaining the purpose of the study and

instructions on responding and a consent letter, one part of which was retained by the respondent and the other part signed and returned.

Questionnaires were then administered over the period of a day to participants who were at work, after an explanation of the necessary ethical requirements. In order not to impact the sales operation of the business, participants were allowed to complete the questionnaires at a time convenient to them during the day.

Responses were collected at the end of the day with questionnaires retained in one receptacle and Informed Consent Letter's in another so as to further highlight the anonymity of responses. No significant issues were encountered in distributing or collating the completed questionnaires. The Consent letters were counted and matched the number of questionnaires received. The data were transcribed onto an Excel worksheet in a format provided by the data analyst during the Pilot study and made available for analysis.

### **3.14 Data Analysis Techniques**

The results that follow in Chapter Four were produced from the analysis performed on the data collected in the above process after having been transcribed to an Excel worksheet. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, version IBM SPSS 21, was used to perform the analysis.

The analysis itself is made up of descriptive and inferential statistics described briefly below and an extract of the statistics run is provided in Appendix 5.

#### **3.14.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics are “used to describe the basic features of the data in a study” and “provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures” (Trochim, 2006). Such statistics aid in reducing voluminous data into a more manageable form.

Extensive use has been made of frequency tables, a form of univariate analysis, which simply refers to the analysis of only one variable at a time. Questionnaire responses have been presented to reflect “the number of people and the percentage belonging to each of the categories for the variable in question” (Bryman & Bell, 2007,p.357). Presentation has

been kept consistent through the sole use of Frequency Tables rather than rotating between that and Frequency Graphs or Pie Charts.

The Median, “the mid-point in a distribution of values” and the Mode, “the value that occurs most frequently in a distribution” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.359) were performed as part of the tests run but were not required and have been included in the appendix for completeness.

### **3.14.2 Inferential Statistics**

Trochim (2006) describes inferential statistics as those that extend beyond the basic features of the data and seek to infer from the sample data how the population might react or further to make assessments of whether reported differences between groups are dependable or not.

“The Kruskal-Wallis test is the nonparametric test and an extension of the Mann-Whitney U test to allow the comparison of more than two independent groups. It is used when we wish to compare three or more sets of scores that come from different groups. It is important to note that the Kruskal-Wallis test is an omnibus test statistic and cannot tell you which specific groups were significantly different from each other; it only tells you that at least two groups were different” (Jain & Choudhary, 2014, pg.28). The test was run to compare two independent groups (e.g. race groups responses to their interest in call centres as a career), the intention being to identify whether there is a ‘significant’ difference in responses between such groups. Detailed justification for the use of this test is provided in Paragraph 4.3.

Correlations reflect a statistical relationship involving dependencies between variables. A positive correlation coefficient means an increase in one causes an increase in the other and a negative coefficient means an increase in one causes a decrease in the other (Trochim, 2006). Such correlations have been calculated through the use of Spearman’s rho.

Cross tabulation, a method of identifying inter-relationships between two (or more) variables (Trochim, 2006), was used to determine if any patterns emerged. In some instances both the count and percentage are shown in order to more easily identify such patterns.

### **3.15 Summary**

In this chapter, a description of the study's methodology was provided. Whilst the constraints of time and resources limit the scope and extent of the research, the work was designed to be a valid and reliable study. The research instrument was discussed along with the pilot study undertaken, the statistical techniques applied and the fieldwork performed. Lastly, the collection of data was conducted in an ethical manner. The findings uncovered through this collection of data are presented in Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

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#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the findings derived from the research questionnaire and presents the results, as they relate to the research objectives, in the questionnaire format. The chapter focuses specifically on these results with the discussion in the following chapter – what discussion exists is solely to provide some continuity to the next chapter. Extensive use has been made of tables to present the findings based on the empirical study.

Some 221 responses were received from a total of 270 questionnaires distributed, resulting in a response rate of 82%.

The statistical tests conducted have been detailed in Chapter Three, these include the Cronbach's Alpha, which tests reliability, the Kruskal-Wallis test, analysis of correlations and use of frequency tables and cross tabulations. Only the statistically significant statistics are presented in the body of the text with the remainder available in Appendix 5 for reference purposes.

A discussion of these results together with the conclusions that can be reached from these findings and related recommendations are discussed in Chapter Five.

#### **4.2 Treatment of Neutral Responses**

Having used a 5-point Likert scale, the consequence is a number of responses that neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement posed in the Questionnaire but returned a neutral response. These neutral responses have not been disregarded but rather they have been considered, in the context of the research, for the potential impact they could have on staff turnover in Durcall. For example, a sizable neutral response (34.3%) to the statement "I want a career in Call Centres" cannot be disregarded for the potential that converting such respondents to a career oriented view of call centres could have on staff retention or the impact that ignoring the group could have on staff turnover.

### 4.3 Use of Kruskal-Wallis Test

Kruskal-Wallis is the non-parametric equivalent of ANOVA and compares between the medians of two or more samples to determine if the samples have come from different populations, where the assumptions underlying parametric tests have been violated. The data analysed was independent. The distributions do not have to be normal and the variances do not have to be equal – as per Q-Q plots that were reviewed, and also the tests of normality that were run. Essentially  $p = \text{Kruskal-Wallis}(x, \text{group})$  returns the p-value for a test of the null hypothesis that the data in each categorical group, as specified by the grouping variable group, comes from the same distribution. The alternative hypothesis is that not all groups come from the same distribution. One would otherwise have run the ANOVA test but due to a gross violation of assumptions, despite it being a robust test, it would have given erroneous results. The non-parametric equivalent is therefore the correct application to apply in these instances (Upton, 2014).

### 4.4 Analysis of Responses by Frequency & Percentage

The following descriptive statistics are presented in the order of the questionnaire and reflect the frequency and percentages of the responses.

Table 4.1 Analysis by Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-24	108	48.9	48.9	48.9
25-34	95	43.0	43.0	91.9
Valid 35-49	17	7.7	7.7	99.5
50+	1	0.5	0.5	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

Responses revealed that 48.9% (108) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-24 years, 43% between 25-34 years, 7.7% were between 35-49 years and 0.5% over the age of 50 years ( $n = 221$ ). The bulk of call centre agents (91.9%) are under the age of 35. That factor may contribute towards the high staff turnover rate.

Table 4.2 Analysis by Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	62	28.1	28.1	28.1
Female	159	71.9	71.9	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

In total 28.1% of respondents are male and 71.9% are female (n = 221). More than two-thirds of the agent body comprises of female agents. Such statistics are in line with the literature review where globally females make up 69% of the workforce (Holman *et al.*, 2007).

Table 4.3 Analysis by Race

	Race	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African/Black	27	12.2	12.2	12.2
	Caucasian	1	0.5	0.5	12.7
	Coloured	14	6.3	6.3	19.0
	Indian	179	81.0	81.0	100.0
	Total	221	100.0	100.0	

The racial breakdown of respondents was 12.2% African, 0.5% Caucasian, 6.3% Coloured and 81% Indian (n = 221).

The table reflects an anticipated regional demographic bias based on provincial demographics and the prevalence of Indian agents in Durban call centres. A similar bias toward Coloured agents is found in statistics from Cape Town (BPesa Western Cape, 2013).

Table 4.4 Analysis by Number of Dependants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	102	46.2	46.2	46.2
1	63	28.5	28.5	74.7
2	40	18.1	18.1	92.8
3	14	6.3	6.3	99.1
3+	2	0.9	0.9	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

Of the respondents, 46.2% have no dependants, 28.5% have 1 dependant, 18.1% have 2 dependants, 6.3% have 3 dependants and 0.9% have more than 3 dependants (n = 221).

This represents a workforce in which 53.8% of employees are relied upon by other family members.

Table 4.5 Analysis by Highest Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Below Matric	13	5.9	5.9	5.9
Matric	144	65.2	65.8	71.7
Certificate	31	14.0	14.2	85.8
Diploma	27	12.2	12.3	98.2
Degree	4	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	219	99.1	100.0	
Missing System	2	0.9		
Total	221	100.0		

The data on education revealed that 5.9% of respondents have a qualification less than matric, 65.8% have a matric, 14.2% have a matric and certificate, 12.3% have a diploma and 1.8% have a degree (n = 219).

The low frequency of respondents with less than a matric (6%) reflects client requirements of Durcall related to minimum agent education requirements. Additional legislative requirements set minimum standards ('Fit and Proper' requirements) for the provision of certain financial advisory or intermediary services (FAIS Act, 2002). What is of interest is that 14.1% of the respondents have diplomas and degrees. The statistic of 1.8% being degreed employees is consistent with the South African average of 2% presented in the literature review (Benner et al., 2007, p.7).



Table 4.6 Analysis of agents length of service at Durcall

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<1 month	5	2.3	2.3
	1-2months	34	15.4	17.7
	3-6 months	53	24.0	41.8
	6-12 months	55	24.9	66.8
	>12 months	73	33.0	100.0
Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing System	1	0.5		
Total	221	100.0		

Staff tenure at Durcall revealed that 2.3% of respondents have been with the company less than one month, 15.5% between 1 and 2 months, 24.1% between 3 and 6 months, 25% between 6 and 12 months and 33.2% for more than 12 months (n=220). These statistics exclude all agents still in the initial induction training.

From an H.R. perspective, one can see that managing a call centre is challenging given that almost 42% of employees have less than six months service at Durcall. This impacts on team spirit, employee morale, continuity, service quality and customer satisfaction. This also tends to support literature on the problem of call centre employee turnover.

The fact that Durcall is able to retain 58.2% of employees for longer than six months is a positive factor and it supports their view that their retention rate is better than that of some competitors.

Table 4.7 Analysis of whether agents had prior call centre experience before starting at Durcall

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	184	83.3	83.3	83.3
Valid No	37	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

Reponses revealed that 83.3% of respondents had prior call centre experience and 16.7% did not (n=221).

This statistic carries with it a potentially positive and negative inference. From an operational perspective, the high level of prior related work experience suggests an agent

body that would reach full productivity more quickly than an inexperienced workforce. Conversely, the majority of the agent body has shown some indication of having moved from a call centre previously, which would support the literature related to turnover or churn between call centres (Budwar *et al.*, 2009 and Townsend, 2007) and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Table 4.8 Analysis of whether employees were unemployed before joining Durcall

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	88	39.8	40.0	40.0
Valid No	132	59.7	60.0	100.0
Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing System	1	0.5		
Total	221	100.0		

In total 40% of respondents were out of work before joining the company and 60% were employed elsewhere. Correlation analysis revealed no statistical significance between respondent's employment situation prior to joining Durcall and their age, dependants or education (Appendix 5 – Correlations). This possibly results from Durcall's participation in a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) funded work programme to up-skill qualifying (unemployed) candidates.

Table 4.9 Analysis of agents perceptions that it is easier to find employment in call centres than many other jobs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	31	14.0	14.1	14.1
Valid Agree	50	22.6	22.7	36.8
Valid Neutral	58	26.2	26.4	63.2
Valid Disagree	49	22.2	22.3	85.5
Valid Strongly Disagree	32	14.5	14.5	100.0
Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing System	1	0.5		
Total	221	100.0		

In response to the ease of access into call centres, 14.1% of respondents strongly agreed, 22.7% agreed, 26.4% were neutral, 22.3% disagreed and 14.5% strongly disagreed, that it was easier to find employment in call centres than many other jobs (n=220).

This suggests that 36.6% of employees may have chosen entry into call centres and the business not for specific career or work objectives but because they viewed it as an easier alternative for employment than other employment possibilities, which may have a bearing on their resilience in the role.

Table 4.10 Analysis of whether agents sought a career in call centres

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	48	21.7	22.2	22.2
	Agree	65	29.4	30.1	52.3
	Neutral	74	33.5	34.3	86.6
	Disagree	16	7.2	7.4	94.0
	Strongly Disagree	13	5.9	6.0	100.0
	Total	216	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	5	2.3		
Total		221	100.0		

In total 22.2% of respondents strongly agreed, 30.1% agreed, 34.3% were neutral, 7.4% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed that they wanted a career in call centres (n=216)

With 52.3% of respondents seeking a career in call centres, they at least appear to be adequately catered for by Durcall's recruitment and selection process. Of concern is that 13.4% or 29 employees indicated that they did not want a career in call centres. The largest group of respondents however were neutral (34.3%) and while this may reflect the central tendency effect, the group represents such a significant part of the company's workforce that Durcall needs to pay attention to this group as it offers the biggest opportunity for staff retention for those agents who are genuinely undecided or don't have a positive view of call centres as a career.

Table 4.11 Analysis of whether agents had moved between call centres in the past

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	6	2.7	2.7
	Agree	78	35.3	38.0
	Neutral	48	21.7	59.7
	Disagree	40	18.1	77.8
	Strongly Disagree	49	22.2	100.0
	Total	221	100.0	100.0

In total 2.7% of respondents strongly agreed, 35.3% agreed, 21.7% were neutral, 18.1% disagreed and 22.2% strongly disagreed, that they had moved between call centres in the past (n=221)

This set of findings clearly indicates the transitory nature of call centre operators and is in line with the literature (Budwar *et al.*, 2009) as 38% have moved within the industry more than once.

The apparent anomalous results when compared with the responses on prior call centre experience reflect the situation where staff leave call centre jobs for other employment or for a multitude of other reasons (family, health and pregnancy) but return to call centre work later on. This ties in with ease of access to the industry and the concern for Durcall's recruitment department in identifying agents who are likely to provide good service as opposed to Durcall becoming an employer of convenience.

This statistic again points to concerns around staff turnover when only 22.2% of respondents feel strongly that they don't move between call centres. This 22.2% equates to 49 agents and since 37 agents have not previously been employed at a call centre (Table 4.7), may indicate an even lower persistency in service with a single employer, though it is not known to what extent these two groups overlap.

Table 4.12 Analysis of whether agents moved to Durcall on the belief that prospects are better than at their previous employer

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	111	50.2	50.5	50.5
	Agree	66	29.9	30.0	80.5
	Neutral	29	13.1	13.2	93.6
	Disagree	11	5.0	5.0	98.6
	Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		

In total 50.5% of respondents strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 13.2% were neutral, 5% disagreed and 1.4% strongly disagreed that they moved to the company because their prospects are better than at their previous employer (n=220).

Table 4.13 Analysis of whether the work is what agents thought it would be

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	46	20.8	20.9	20.9
	Agree	101	45.7	45.9	66.8
	Neutral	44	19.9	20.0	86.8
	Disagree	20	9.0	9.1	95.9
	Strongly Disagree	9	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		

Some 20.9% of respondents strongly agreed 45.9% agreed, 20% were neutral, 9.1% disagreed and 4.1% strongly disagreed that the work was what they thought it would be (n=220).

Thirteen percent of respondents (29 agents) expected something different from the job and a further 20% neither supported nor refuted the statement. While the neutrals cannot be read to disagree with the statement, it is in Durcall's interest to ensure such respondents don't convert to a negative outlook and need to address this in its recruitment process as doing so will ensure that prospective employees are better informed as to what to expect from the job before accepting posts at Durcall. Doing so may lower the turnover rate.

Table 4.14 Analysis of whether the company had met commitments made at recruitment phase regarding pay, transport and campaigns

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	74	33.5	33.9	33.9
	Agree	79	35.7	36.2	70.2
	Neutral	36	16.3	16.5	86.7
	Disagree	22	10.0	10.1	96.8
	Strongly Disagree	7	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	218	98.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.4		
Total		221	100.0		

Altogether 33.9% of respondents strongly agreed, 36.2% agreed, 16.5% were neutral, 10.1% disagreed and 3.2% strongly disagreed that the company had met commitments made at recruitment phase (n=218).

In a similar pattern to the previous question, 13.3% of respondents (29 agents) felt that Durcall had not lived up to its commitments and a further 16.5% were undecided.

Table 4.15 Analysis of whether agents believed they had the sales skills necessary to be a success at telesales

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	129	58.4	58.6	58.6
	Agree	80	36.2	36.4	95.0
	Neutral	8	3.6	3.6	98.6
	Disagree	2	0.9	0.9	99.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	0.5	0.5	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		

The results revealed that 58.6% of respondents strongly agreed, 36.4% agreed, 3.6% were neutral, 0.9% disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed that they have the skills necessary to be a success at telesales (n=220).

A full 95% of agents feel they possess the sales skills to perform their role.

Table 4.16 Analysis of whether agents believe the work environment (facilities and work area) is good

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	120	54.3	54.5	54.5
	Agree	85	38.5	38.6	93.2
	Neutral	12	5.4	5.5	98.6
	Disagree	2	0.9	0.9	99.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	0.5	0.5	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		

Some 54.5% of respondents strongly agreed, 38.6% agreed, 5.5% were neutral, 0.9% disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed that the work environment is good (n=220). A very positive result with only 3 agents expressing a negative sentiment, as factors such as the work environment are an important aid in neutralising or diminishing any negative aspects of the work itself.

Table 4.17 Analysis of whether agents felt that upfront training prepared them well for the job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	113	51.1	51.6	51.6
	Agree	88	39.8	40.2	91.8
	Neutral	15	6.8	6.8	98.6
	Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	100.0
	Total	219	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	0.9		
Total		221	100.0		

A large percentage, (51.6%) of respondents strongly agreed, 40.2% agreed, 6.8% were neutral, 1.4% disagreed and none strongly disagreed that the upfront training prepared them well for the job (n=219)

Only 3 agents felt underprepared after the upfront (induction) training phase, but the number of neutrals suggests a potential weakness in Durcall's testing process before signing agents into the live sales environment.

Table 4.18 Analysis of whether ongoing training has helped agents achieve their targets

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	70	31.7	31.8	31.8
	Agree	92	41.6	41.8	73.6
	Neutral	40	18.1	18.2	91.8
	Disagree	13	5.9	5.9	97.7
	Strongly Disagree	5	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		

In total 31.8% of respondents strongly agreed, 41.8% agreed, 18.2% were neutral, 5.9% disagreed and 2.3% strongly disagreed that ongoing training had helped them achieve their targets (n=220)

When compared to results from the upfront training where 51.6% of agents strongly acknowledged the training received, only 31.8% felt as strongly about the ongoing coaching. A full 26% of agents did not have a positive response to Durcall's ongoing training (coaching).

The implication on turnover is significant as it is this coaching that imparts the softer skills to agents and assists them in their ongoing productivity. That is, sales agents are quite often commission based and as such increased productivity impacts their take home pay directly. An improvement in sales skills will therefore directly impact their earning ability and thus have a bearing on any decisions to stay or leave.

Table 4.19 Analysis of whether agents felt training helped to deal with the pressure/stress of the job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	74	33.5	33.6	33.6
	Agree	85	38.5	38.6	72.3
	Neutral	41	18.6	18.6	90.9
	Disagree	16	7.2	7.3	98.2
	Strongly Disagree	4	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		



Some 33.6% of respondents strongly agreed, 38.6% agreed, 18.6% were neutral, 7.3% disagreed and 1.8% strongly disagreed that training helped them deal with the pressure/stress of the job (n=220).

These findings are not dissimilar to those for ongoing training (coaching) and offer some consistency from Durcall's perspective as such training forms part of trainers' and supervisors' ongoing coaching role. As an element of this coaching, it would appear then not to be overlooked. Nine percent of agents however found the training inadequate and a further 18.6% were neutral. While it is conjecture as to why the neutrals neither agree nor disagree, the percentage is significant enough for Durcall to consider further interventions because of the implication of such a large body potentially being unable to cope with the pressure for an extended period.

Table 4.20 Analysis of whether training led agents to believe that the organisation cares

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	79	35.7	35.9	35.9
	Agree	102	46.2	46.4	82.3
	Neutral	33	14.9	15.0	97.3
	Disagree	5	2.3	2.3	99.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	0.5	0.5	100.0
	Total	220	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.5		
Total		221	100.0		

In total 35.9% of respondents strongly agreed, 46.4% agreed, 15% were neutral, 2.3% disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed that the training made them think that the company cared (n=220)

Again, whilst the responses are largely positive, there appears to be room for improvement – certainly when compared to the scores for upfront training. The number of neutral responses reduced when compared to coaching and stress training.

Table 4.21 Analysis of whether agents believed their supervisor possessed the skills to manage the team

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	114	51.6	52.3	52.3
	Agree	73	33.0	33.5	85.8
	Neutral	23	10.4	10.6	96.3
	Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	97.7
	Strongly Disagree	5	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	218	98.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.4		
Total		221	100.0		

More than half the respondents (52.3%) strongly agreed, 33.5% agreed, 10.6% were neutral, 1.4% disagreed and 2.3% strongly disagreed that their current supervisor has the skills to manage the team (n=218)

Table 4.22 Analysis of whether agents believed that their supervisor helped them improve their skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	101	45.7	46.3	46.3
	Agree	77	34.8	35.3	81.6
	Neutral	27	12.2	12.4	94.0
	Disagree	7	3.2	3.2	97.2
	Strongly Disagree	6	2.7	2.8	100.0
	Total	218	98.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.4		
Total		221	100.0		

The findings revealed that 46.3% of respondents strongly agreed, 35.3% agreed, 12.4% were neutral, 3.2% disagreed and 2.8% strongly disagreed that their supervisor helps them improve their skills (n=218).

This frequency distribution reflects a similar pattern to that of ongoing training in the preceding section with 18.4% of agents not recording a positive response to the adequacy of supervisory assistance in improving their skills.

Table 4.23 Analysis of whether agents believed that their supervisor helped them deal with job pressure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	97	43.9	44.3	44.3
	Agree	71	32.1	32.4	76.7
	Neutral	42	19.0	19.2	95.9
	Disagree	4	1.8	1.8	97.7
	Strongly Disagree	5	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	219	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	0.9		
Total		221	100.0		

Of the responses received 44.3% of respondents strongly agreed, 32.4% agreed, 19.2% were neutral, 1.8% disagreed and 2.3% strongly disagreed that their supervisor helps them deal with job pressure (n=219).

This distribution of responses shows a 4.9% reduction in positive responses from those in the preceding question. Durcall needs to take note of the pattern that, through both training and supervision, the positive statistics related to stress management have been lower than those of related questions in each section.

While only a small number of response were negative the quantum of neutrals suggests investigations into the adequacy of supervisor assisted stress management is warranted. Since the ability to handle work pressure is an important driver of staff turnover it's imperative that Durcall understand the nature of these neutral responses.

Table 4.24 Analysis of whether agents believed their supervisor was well respected by management/the company

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	107	48.4	49.1	49.1
	Agree	86	38.9	39.4	88.5
	Neutral	20	9.0	9.2	97.7
	Disagree	2	0.9	0.9	98.6
	Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Total	218	98.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.4		
Total		221	100.0		

In total 49.1% of respondents strongly agreed, 39.4% agreed, 9.2% were neutral, 0.9% disagreed and 1.4% strongly disagreed that that their supervisor appears to be well respected by management (n=218)

It is important for Durcall that up to 88.5% of agents expressed a positive response to their supervisor's status within the organisation, as their role represents the next step for career advancement and it needs to be something worth aspiring to. There appears to be a link between responses as to the supervisors' skills in performing their jobs and whether the supervisor is well respected by management, and a strong correlation of 0.765 would seem to support this.

The reliability statistic returned by responses to the peripheral questions asked in the last objective do not meet the minimum standard of reliability. Whilst these results can't be reliably replicated, they have been included for any insights they may offer Durcall in combating staff turnover.

Table 4.25 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.474	4

Table 4.26 Analysis of whether agents felt they got on well with their peers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	128	57.9	58.4	58.4
	Agree	83	37.6	37.9	96.3
	Neutral	7	3.2	3.2	99.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	0.5	0.5	100.0
	Total	219	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	0.9		
Total		221	100.0		

In total 58.4% of respondents strongly agreed, 37.9% agreed, 3.2% were neutral, none disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed that they get on well with their peers (n=219). These statistics are almost completely positive with only one agent disagreeing with the statement. As an indicator of morale or underlying people issues, this is a positive result.

Table 4.27 Analysis of whether agents felt they could get to and from work easily

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	92	41.6	42.4	42.4
	Agree	87	39.4	40.1	82.5
	Neutral	23	10.4	10.6	93.1
	Disagree	11	5.0	5.1	98.2
	Strongly Disagree	4	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	217	98.2	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.8		
Total		221	100.0		

Some 42.4% of respondents strongly agreed, 40.1% agreed, 10.6% were neutral, 5.1% disagreed and 1.8% strongly disagreed that they can get to and from work easily (n=217).

Transportation issues had been raised as a particular agent concern and one that resulted in agents seeking employment elsewhere where transport to work was less of an issue. Whilst 82.5% of agents offered a positive response, Durcall must take note of the remaining 17.5%, 6.9% of whom are currently finding it difficult to get to and from work, with obvious implications for staff attrition.

Table 4.28 Analysis of whether agents domestic situation (home/relationships) could influence their decision to leave the company in the near future

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	21	9.5	9.6	9.6
	Agree	25	11.3	11.5	21.1
	Neutral	48	21.7	22.0	43.1
	Disagree	60	27.1	27.5	70.6
	Strongly Disagree	64	29.0	29.4	100.0
	Total	218	98.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.4		
Total		221	100.0		

A full 9.6% of respondents strongly agreed, whilst 11.5% agreed, 22% were neutral, 27.5% disagreed and 29.4% strongly disagreed that their domestic situation may influence their decision to leave the company in the near future (n=218)

Only 56.9% of respondents felt there were no home or relationship pressures on them that would influence their jobs at Durcall. A full 21.1% felt that such factors did exist that

might cause them to leave – this is large percentage of the agent body, given that there was an 82% response rate to the questionnaire survey that was a census of all agents who had passed training. Of further concern is that 22% of agents were neutral on the subject. Whilst these results support the concerns that were raised in staff exit interviews, a qualitative approach is required to understand the reasons behind this statistic. Durcall needs to address the issue as this presents a significant risk regarding staff turnover.

Table 4.29 Analysis of whether existing health issues could influence an agents decision to leave the company in the near future

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	3	1.4	1.4	1.4
Agree	12	5.4	5.5	6.8
Neutral	28	12.7	12.8	19.6
Disagree	93	42.1	42.5	62.1
Strongly Disagree	83	37.6	37.9	100.0
Total	219	99.1	100.0	
Missing System	2	0.9		
Total	221	100.0		

Only 1.4% of respondents strongly agreed and 5.5% agreed, some 12.8% were neutral, 42.5% disagreed and 37.9% strongly disagreed that existing health issues could influence their decision to leave the company in the near future (n=219).

Whilst these responses are less concerning than the proceeding question, 15 agents foresee the possibility of leaving soon due to health reasons, and 28 agents are uncertain. The issue has been highlighted in exit interviews as being a concern, and these statistics reflect that, with nearly 20% of the workforce not suggesting otherwise, this could be a concern for Durcall.

#### 4.5 Cross Tabulation Analysis

Cross tabulation, a method of identifying inter-relationships between two (or more) variables (Trochim, 2006), was used to determine if any patterns emerged. In some instances both the count and percentage are shown in order to more easily identify such patterns. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to identify significant variations in responses and these responses were explored further by performing the cross tabulation analysis below. Only particular cross tabulations that are relevant have been presented here and the remainder are available in Appendix 5.

Table 4.30 Cross tabulation of Age (Q1) and whether agents were interested in a career in Call Centres (Q10)

		Career in Call Centres					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Age	18-24	22	26	46	7	6	107
	25-34	24	30	24	7	7	92
	35-49	2	8	4	2	0	16
	50+	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total		48	65	74	16	13	216

A disproportionate number of agents between the ages of 18-24 expressed a neutral opinion on whether they wanted a career in call centres and only 44.9% (48 of 107) of that age bracket provided a positive response. By comparison the 25-34 and 35-49 age brackets recorded a 58.7% (54 of 92) and 62.5% (10 of 16) positive response.

Table 4.31 Cross Tabulation of Gender (Q2) and agents ease of getting to and from work (Q26)

		Ease of getting to and from work					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	Male	33	22	3	2	1	61
	Female	59	65	20	9	3	156
Total		92	87	23	11	4	217

Female responses were less positive on average than their male counterparts with 38% of women strongly in agreement and 42% in agreement (80% in total) compared to 54% (strongly agree) and 36% (agree) for a total positive response of 91% from men. This statistic offers some insight for Durcall's management given agents' work hours and issues of staff safety and absenteeism rates. Further cross tabulation and correlation analysis offered no significant links of relevance between gender and the remaining questions, which is evidenced in Appendix 5.

Table 4.32 Cross tabulation of Race (Q3) and agents interest in a call centre career (Q10) (by frequency)

	Career in Call Centres					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
African/Black	3	7	7	5	5	27
Caucasian	0	1	0	0	0	1
Coloured	2	1	8	1	1	13
Indian	43	56	59	10	7	175
Total	48	65	74	16	13	216

Table 4.33 Cross tabulation of Race (Q3) and agents interest in a call centre career (Q10) (by percentage)

	Career in Call Centres					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
African/Black	11%	26%	26%	19%	19%	100%
Caucasian	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Coloured	15%	8%	62%	8%	8%	100%
Indian	25%	32%	34%	6%	4%	100%
Total	22%	30%	34%	7%	6%	100%

Some 38% of African agents responded negatively to the question when compared to 10% of Indian and 16% of Coloured responses. The representation of African/Black respondents is a small subset of the overall sample but the Kruskal-Wallis test below suggested a significant difference in attitude toward call centres as a career opportunity between the represented race groups.



Table 4.34 Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for significant differences between Race and other variables

Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>																			
	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	C1	C2	C3	C4	D1	D2	D3	D4	E1	E2	E3	E4	F1	F2
Chi-Square	2.456	3.045	10.882	6.483	3.062	3.579	5.039	7.481	1.261	1.813	4.910	2.423	3.859	3.254	3.083	1.867	5.022	2.666	2.778
df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.483	0.385	0.012	0.090	0.382	0.311	0.169	0.058	0.738	0.612	0.179	0.489	0.277	0.354	0.379	0.600	0.170	0.446	0.427

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: A3

There is a significant difference in respondents Race (Grouping Variable A3) and Career in Call Centres (B3) ( $H(3) = 10.882$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ).

Table 4.35 Cross tabulation of Education level (Q5) and an agents Work Expectations (Q13) (by frequency)

	Work Expectations					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Below Matric	3	5	4	0	1	13
Matric	35	73	22	9	5	144
Certificate	3	12	10	4	2	31
Diploma	3	9	6	7	1	26
Degree	1	1	2	0	0	4
Total	45	100	44	20	9	218

Table 4.36 Cross tabulation of Education level (Q5) and an agents Work Expectations (Q13) (by percentage)

	Work Expectations					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Below Matric	23%	38%	31%	0%	8%	100%
Matric	24%	51%	15%	6%	3%	100%
Certificate	10%	39%	32%	13%	6%	100%
Diploma	12%	35%	23%	27%	4%	100%
Degree	25%	25%	50%	0%	0%	100%
Total	21%	46%	20%	9%	4%	100%

Somewhat surprisingly, certificate and diploma holders report experiencing less consistency between their expectations of the work prior to joining and the job as it is, when compared to respondents with lower levels of education. The sample of 4 agents at a degree level though is too small to draw an inference from.

There was no statistically significant correlation between education and whether agents thought it easier to get a call centre job than another, or between education levels and whether they were employed or not before joining Durcall.

Table 4.37 Cross tabulation of an agents Tenure (Q6) and their Movement between Call Centres (Q11) (by frequency)

	Movement between call centres					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<1 month	1	1	1	1	1	5
1-2months	1	7	7	8	11	34
3-6 months	2	11	12	13	15	53
6-12 months	0	26	10	8	11	55
>12 months	2	33	18	9	11	73
Total	6	78	48	39	49	220

Table 4.38 Cross tabulation of an agents Tenure (Q6) and their Movement between Call Centres (Q11) (by percentage)

	Movement between call centres					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<1 month	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	100%
1-2months	3%	21%	21%	24%	32%	100%
3-6 months	4%	21%	23%	25%	28%	100%
6-12 months	0%	47%	18%	15%	20%	100%
>12 months	3%	45%	25%	12%	15%	100%
Total	3%	35%	22%	18%	22%	100%

The cross tabulation of tenure and movement between call centres revealed no significant correlation. The percentage of agents however with more experience (6 and more months) who have moved more than once averaged about 46% when compared to the 25% of those with less than 6 months tenure. This may be explained by the table below.

Table 4.39 Cross tabulation of an agents Tenure (Q6) and whether they felt Durcall offered better employment prospects (Q12)

	Better Prospects					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<1 month	1	2	2	0	0	5
1-2months	16	8	8	2	0	34
3-6 months	20	19	7	5	2	53
6-12 months	26	17	8	3	1	55
>12 months	47	20	4	1	0	72
Total	110	66	29	11	3	219

The number of positive responses equates to:

- <1 month – 60%
- 1-2 months – 71%
- 3-6 months – 74%
- 6-12 months – 78%
- >12 months – 93%

This reveals a steady increase in the perception of prospects being better at Durcall with length of service. A similar trend is visible in the agents' assessment of their skills where 88% of respondents with 1 to 2 months tenure responded positively but agents with 6 to 12 months tenure reported a 98% positive feedback. Lastly, 99% of agents with more than 12 months tenure reported positively about their interaction with their peers.

No correlation or significance was found between agent tenure and their pursuit of a career in call centres, nor any visible difference in tenure between those who were employed and unemployed when joining Durcall.

Table 4.40 Cross Tabulation of agents Experience (Q7) and whether they felt they had the Necessary Skills to do the job (Q15)

	Necessary Skills					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Yes	112	65	5	0	1	183
No	17	15	3	2	0	37
Total	129	80	8	2	1	220

The table reflects the relationship between prior call centre experience and an agent's belief in the adequacy of their skills. Converted to a percentage, 97% of those with prior experience reported a positive assessment of their skills as opposed to only 86% of those without prior experience.

Table 4.41 Cross tabulation of agents Experience (Q7) and their need for Ongoing Training (Q18) (by frequency)

Experience	Adequacy of Coaching					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Yes	53	79	34	13	4	183
No	17	13	6	0	1	37
Total	70	92	40	13	5	220

Table 4.42 Cross tabulation of agents Experience (Q7) and their need for Ongoing Training (Q18) (by percentage)

Experience	Adequacy of Coaching					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Yes	29%	43%	19%	7%	2%	100%
No	46%	35%	16%	0%	3%	100%
Total	32%	42%	18%	6%	2%	100%

Agents with no prior experience report more positively on the benefits of coaching to their abilities (81%) when compared to agents with prior experience (72%). A similar but less pronounced outcome was reported by inexperienced agents and the assistance received from supervisors.

A moderately significant correlation (0.449) was calculated between an agent's previous call centre experience and their propensity to move between call centres.

#### 4.6 Qualitative Question

The questionnaire contained a single open ended question – “What does the company not get right that may influence your decision to leave in the future?” The results of the question were summarised by theme and frequency. Exactly 100 respondents of the 221 returns completed provided feedback on this question resulting in 103 identifiable comments.

Table 4.43 Themes identified in Question 29: “What does the company not get right that may influence your decision to leave in the future?”

Major Themes	Frequency
No issue raised – respondent was complimentary of the organisation	27
Issues related to salaries and benefits	22
Issues related to the nature of the data/leads available for dialling	16
Issues related to supervisors	10
Issues related to the agents' campaigns/transfer between campaigns	7
Issues related to career growth	6
Issues related to working hours	4
Other issues	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>

While the question sought more depth in understanding agent's views of what required improvement in the company, the single biggest theme was a positive response on what the company had done well. The bulk of the negatives related to salaries and benefits, a topic which was excluded from the research, and operational issues relating to the campaigns (products) the agents were selling and the adequacy or appropriateness of the leads (customers) they had to dial. Of note was the fact that supervisor complaints were received in addition to the quantitative responses on supervisors, demonstrating the impact and importance they play in an agents work life.

#### 4.7 Summary

The findings related to each of the objectives have been presented and briefly discussed through the presentation of frequency tables, cross-tabulation analysis and correlation tests, and mention has been made of significant items highlighted by the Kruskal-Wallis test. Although the analysis did not show a significant statistical relationship between all the factors tested, a number of relationships were identified that could contribute to Durcall's high turnover rate and offers the company the findings necessary to develop measures to counter such attrition.

Chapter Five presents the discussion, conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings with discussion of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and survey results presented in Chapter Four, and proffers recommendations based on the conclusions reached. Suggestions for future research have also been made.

#### 5.2 Objective One

**Research Question:** To establish why agents apply for employment at Durcall

##### Discussion – Literature

- The literature supports the view that employees in call centres don't necessarily enter the industry with the intention of making a career of it, and it's only after promotion to supervisor level that this attitude may change (McDonnell *et al.*, 2013).
- The nature of call centres as mass employers means entry requirements to the industry are low and this, combined with a growing industry, creates the opportunity for churn between call centres and from the industry as a whole, as a young workforce continually seeks better prospects. Despite entry into the industry being easy, Durcall were at least twice as selective in placing new agents when compared to the industry average represented by the respondents to the 2007 South African Call Centre Industry Survey authored by Benner *et al.*, 2007.
- The movement of staff comes at a huge operational cost as new recruits take time to get up to speed, added to the cost of recruitment and training.
- The literature also showed the dilemma of employing experienced agents who bring quicker productivity but show an increased propensity to move between call centres.

##### Discussion – Study

- The survey findings appear to support the literature, for whilst 52.3% of respondents were positively disposed to a call centre career, some 13.4% were not. Of concern is

that 34.3% of respondents were neutral and this suggests a significant portion of the agent body to which Durcall must pay attention to ensure that they swing to a more positive outlook.

- While only 38% of agents responded that they had moved between call centres in the past (Table 4.11) a full 83.3% declared that they had prior call centre experience (Question 7). Accepting the potential ambiguity in Question 11, the result from Question 7 alone clearly supports the findings of Budwar *et al.*, (2009) and Townsend (2007) regarding the propensity for churn in the industry.
- This is further supported by the 80.5% of agents who had made the move to Durcall on the anticipation of improved prospects.
- There was no statistical support in this research for the suggestion that previously unemployed staff potentially show a greater loyalty, work ethic or improved productivity as Hasluck (2011) suggests. Though not probed in detail, those employees who were previously unemployed did not appear to act significantly differently to the rest of the agent body in their approach to the remaining questions in the survey with the exception of their confidence in their skills (Question 15).
- Use of the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a significant differences in responses by race to agents' view of call centres as a career. Such a result warrants further analysis within Durcall to determine whether there is an underlying issue to this response given the centres predominantly Indian sales work force (81%).
- The results of Table 4.30 also revealed that positive responses to the career-oriented question showed a steady increase through the age groups: 45% (18-24 years old), 59% (25-34) and 63% (35-49).
- The Kruksal-Wallis test revealed no significant difference between the genders responses to their view a call centres as a career and therefore do not indicate a preferred recruitment source in that regard.
- Responses to whether it was easier to find employment in a call centre as opposed to other jobs was not conclusive with an even distribution around a central mean ( $M=3$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ), with the majority of respondents being undecided. Exactly as many agents believed it was easier as believed it was more difficult to find employment in call centres.
- When investigating the impact of Employee Experience on respondent's answers to the questionnaire, the only significant difference was revealed in their responses to Question 15 and whether they believed they had the skills necessary to be successful in



telesales. This is revealing in that they did not show a greater inclination for a career in call centres, for instance.

- Table 4.39 was revealing in that the longer an agent stays in the business the more positive their belief that Durcall provides better prospects than other employers.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of staff turnover in call centres is a global one and not specific to South Africa or Durcall in particular. The drivers that cause such high attrition are inherent to the nature of the work: high monitoring, regular exposure to emotional labour and little opportunity to vary the work approach.

Combined with this is an industry that attracts a younger workforce who appear to be less predisposed to a career in call centres and who are prone to regular movement in the hope of better prospects elsewhere. This is potentially amplified by the ‘sacrificial’ or numbers based approach to recruiting which, despite Durcall’s more strenuous entrance criteria, has created an industry where work is transitory.

Agents’ motivations at the time of joining were therefore sought in order to determine if there were any early warning indicators as to different agents’ propensities to stay in Durcall’s employ based on their circumstances, prior behaviour and career outlook.

The statistics on the ease of finding work in call centres as opposed to other forms of employment wasn’t revealing but the volume of movement between call centres and the 34.3% of agents undecided on whether they’re interested in a career in call centres bears out the literature and needs to be addressed if Durcall is to reduce its churn.

The statistics revealed that age and race are specific factors to consider in addressing turnover in Durcall, where the former indicates that older agents tend to be more favourably disposed to a career in call centres and the latter that an opportunity exists to address internal factors that are influencing fewer African agents to consider such a career when compared to their peers.

Whilst the bulk of agents have prior experience and would have an understanding of the nature of call centre work, there appears nonetheless to be a gap in understanding of the true nature of the work. Even the apparent performance benefit of employing experienced

agents is nullified by the fact that in a large percentage of cases they've shown a history of having moved between call centres more than once.

Taken in combination it seems that the intentions of a significant number of agents at the time of employment are to take the job as a temporary measure or stepping stone to other things which has huge repercussions for Durcall's productivity and profitability.

## **Recommendations**

- The fundamental perception of call centres as modern day 'sweatshops' needs to be addressed. To do so, a cohesive industry body needs to be set up at both a national and provincial level to promote the image of the industry, address those issues and participants that add to this perception, and provide a forum to look for solutions to the practical issues plaguing the sector. Attention needs to be given to developing adequate benchmark reporting by call centre type in order to better understand the dynamics and best practice of what are quite different business models and job designs, and to look at practical issues such as the high churn between participants within the industry. Only through changing perceptions about the industry (as an employer) in this country can one hope to match the average tenure achieved by those call centres in other countries and in so doing reduce turnover. Durcall needs to play a role in this through participation on such industry bodies as exist or instigating such, even if only at a regional/city level.
- Since Durcall sources the majority of candidates with prior experience and agents do move for the perception of better prospects, it would be advantageous to further develop an image as an employer of choice amongst call centres in Durban. Since agents' perceptions drive their movement, consideration should be given to the marketing of the organisation by media applicable to the target audience, such as social media, and reinforcing such communication internally.
- Durcall need to further investigate the underlying issue that led to a lower response rate from African/Black agents to a career in call centres to determine if there are internal factors driving this response.
- Durcall need to consider their recruitment policies and the potential loyalty or extended tenure that may come from recruiting older candidates who appear to be more positively disposed to a career in call centres.

- Whilst only a fraction of agents are able to gain promotion or a transfer to other roles in the company, it may be in the company's interests to make clear the potential career path and communicate successes both up-front and on an ongoing basis.

### **5.3 Objective Two**

**Research Question:** To examine what impact employee expectations at the recruitment stage have on staff turnover

#### **Discussion – Literature**

- The literature discussed the importance of agents having a full and complete understanding of what the job involved. The literature also made note of the emotional labour that the job entails and not just the technical skills required. With performance monitoring an integral part of outsourced contact centres, such an understanding might be equally relevant to agents with past experience but in a different type of call centre.
- The literature further discussed the importance of the company living up to its commitments as this ultimately demonstrates the organisational culture and as Borstorff & Marker (2007) point out, in an era where salaries and benefits are an expectation, it's this culture that may be the difference between agents staying or leaving.
- Part of this culture is represented by the work environment which acts to neutralise any negatives in the nature and design of the work.
- The skill requirement of agents was explored and the research highlighted the distinction between the recruitment of skills and attitude. The point was made that it's no good to have the attitude and fit with the organisation, but not the technical skill for the job demand, but the review promotes the idea that it may be easier to teach the skill than the attitude.
- Durcall reported a fall off of 46% of recruits during the first month (including training). This suggests that as thorough as the recruitment process might be, the fact that so many agents are falling off or failing training is a concern.
- The literature highlights that call centres are populated by predominantly youthful employees but does not specifically state that older employees in the industry report longer tenure.

#### **Discussion – Study**

- Thirteen percent of employees surveyed felt that the job was not what they expected and 20% were neutral on the point. Whilst the reasons for the neutral responses are not known, it is important that this be understood because it may signal a potential issue at recruitment stage since by far the majority of the call centre agents (83%) have previous call centre experience and could reasonably be expected to understand the nature of the work. A possible explanation is that much of this experience was in an inbound or customer care environment where work experiences are quite different and this needs to be taken into consideration when recruiting.
- The results of the cross tabulation Table 4.35 and 4.36 revealed that agents with lower educational qualifications experienced greater consistency in their expectations of what the work entailed, with a full 31% of diploma holders responding that the work was not what they expected when compared to only 9% of those with a Matric as their highest qualification. By its nature though this quantitative study does not reveal why such a difference might exist and it can only be speculated that perhaps one reason is that the repetitive and 'entry level' nature of work revealed in the literature reviewed and related lack of autonomy or decision making in their role is the cause of this dissatisfaction amongst more educated agents.
- The moderate positive correlation between questions related to understanding the nature of the work and whether the company had lived up to its commitments suggests that the two work hand-in-hand for a more favourable disposition toward the company.
- There is a disconnect between agents' perceptions or ranking of their own skills in the survey and the failure rate in training, as highlighted in the literature. An understanding of sales agent's behavioural profiles would suggest high confidence and dominance characteristics which may explain the apparent anomaly.
- While negative responses to Question 14, regarding Durcall living up to its commitments with respect to pay, transport and campaigns, totalled 13.2% of staff - this represents a very real portion of the agent body who may be dissatisfied and contribute to their intention to quit.
- The qualitative review (Question 29 and Table 4.43) also indicated an issue of agents being moved between different campaigns where original expectation may have been of employment on a single defined campaign.
- There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the work environment (93%).

## **Conclusion**

The implication of employees' expectations not being met is an agent body that disengages from the business. The implication for staff turnover is obvious where new recruits aren't adequately briefed on what to expect or where their expectations differ from reality. While the majority of recruits indicated the work was what they expected, the 13.2% that disagreed represents 36 staff members whose expectations haven't been met, and a further 20% or 54 agents who are undecided. This is a significant proportion of the agent body who may not be satisfied with their current employment.

There is a possibility also of a skills gap between the technical skill required and the attitude or ability to handle the pressures of the environment, which is indicated by the drop in positive responses between the initial upfront training and those responses from agents regarding their ability to handle work pressures. Whilst it would appear that the physical environment is well received, the organisation of the work is not as favourable.

All the negative responses to the questions under this objective represent agents dissatisfied with an element of the business as a result of a deviation from their original expectations and such dissatisfaction could manifest itself in continued agent churn. The further agents who are undecided represent an opportunity to move to a positive disposition or potentially risk further churn if not addressed.

## **Recommendations**

- There needs to be a clear, consistent and complete provision of information to prospective candidates as to what the job entails. Durcall should consider the separate information needs of those with prior outbound experience and those without. Cost and time permitting, the inclusion of a walk through the call centre or discussions with existing agents may impart more background knowledge than the standard recruitment discussions.
- Operational managers should weigh up the operational needs of moving staff between campaigns and the potential consequences of this change to an agent's expectations of dialing a particular campaign. That is, the operation need to expand and contract different work groups according to commercial or logistical considerations needs to be

weighed up with the destabilising effect of moving agents between these different work groups.

- Since the largest negative responses were received related to commitments not being met regarding items such as pay, transport and campaigns, it would be worthwhile for Durcall to formalise the specifics of these at recruitment as well as at the contracting phase. The nature of remuneration and subsidised transport to be offered should be a matter of fact and any ambiguity should be removed to avoid the impact of this becoming a reason for agent attrition. The movement of agents between campaigns for operational reasons also needs to be considered in the light of the impact on agent satisfaction and the potential for further attrition as a result of such moves.
- In line with the recommendation in the previous objective of being a preferred employer, Durcall should continue to focus on the work environment and facilities to negate any negative effects that might be inherent in the work. Such environmental factors could include comfort (appropriate chairs given that agents are desk bound for an entire day), access to meals through the provision of canteen facilities and an extension of 'entertainment' facilities for during breaks (TV, music and games) in the companies communal/breakaway areas.

## 5.4 Objective Three

**Research Question:** To explore the impact of training, or the sufficiency thereof, on staff turnover

### Discussion – Literature

- Durcall's duration of upfront training is on a par with local and global benchmarks.
- The literature focuses significantly on the emotional element of labour – the monotony, lack of autonomy, performance monitoring and burnout issues and potential impact of training interventions. The goal being to alleviate the stress that "might ultimately compel them [agents] to leave the organisation" (Goodwin *et al.*, 2011, p.541).
- The literature points out the distinction that should be made and approach that could be taken to remodel performance monitoring as ongoing training and focus on the positives rather than as a form of control as suggested by Townsend (2007) and reducing anxiety (Holman *et al.*, 2007) and so reduce churn.

- The cost of stress management coaching may be prohibitive but consideration should be given to techniques of stress avoidance.
- Training should be considered as a retention tool since it is proven to foster greater commitment and lower attrition.
- Statistics were presented of the high falloff of staff during the initial training phase and shortly thereafter. The statistics for Durcall were significantly higher than those provided by the Dimension Data (2007) Benchmarking Report, particularly during the initial training period and first month.

### **Discussion – Study**

- Upfront (induction) training, which represents the first stage in an agent's development as they enter the business, received very positive responses with 92% of respondents scoring the question favourably and only 3 agents offering a negative opinion.
- By contrast the scores for ongoing training (coaching), which represents the second phase of an agent's development as they gain on the job experience, showed a marked decline with only 73% registering a positive opinion.
- These scores were repeated for stress management training, which constitutes the third stage of agent development enabling them to not only perform the technical requirements of the job but cope with the emotional aspects and this suggests that whilst significant focus occurs in the upfront training, there may be insufficient attention paid to agents' development after this initial phase.
- The study also revealed that the coaching appears to offer slightly less relevance to those with more experience. Table 4.41 revealed a greater positive response to the impact of coaching (ongoing training) by those who did not have prior experience – 81% positive responses when compared with the 72% from experienced staff (but bearing in mind that inexperienced staff represent only 37 agents of a total of 221 respondents).
- The responses to Question 20, while largely positive, did not reveal any insight into the relationship between investment in training and agents' views of the company.
- The survey sought input from those agents who had already passed training and did not look at why people are falling off during training or failing and as such the results only focused on agents actually active within the organisation.

## **Conclusion**

By far the majority of responses to the adequacy of training within Durcall were positive. What is evident however in the results is that whilst the up-front training is well received by agents surveyed, the proportion of positive responses declines as an agent moves through the training phases described in the discussion above. When comparing the upfront training to responses regarding ongoing training (coaching and skills development) there is a decline in positive responses and a further decline in responses to the adequacy of the provision of stress management skills, the third phase in an agents development. This decline in positive responses indicates a need for further interventions to address agent's abilities to measure up to the performance requirements and handle the stress of the job. Since telesales agents are commissions based, performance has a direct bearing on their earnings while stress management may have an impact on their work life, both of which are shown in the literature to be drivers of staff turnover as agents seek out better prospects.

## **Recommendations**

- Durcall should re-look at the sufficiency and content of its agent coaching and consider targeting this at less experienced agents who, despite their current performance, potentially offer a greater opportunity for improvement than more experienced agents. Since agents are remunerated with commission, by focusing on those agents who have the greatest room for improvement and enabling them to earn commission, such training may influence an agents intentions to leave.
- The company should heed Mahesh & Kasturi's (2006) advice and consider stress avoidance techniques, should stress management training be too costly. Techniques should be found to break the monotony or negative mind-set that might cause an agent to disengage and can consider simple techniques such as regular breaks and team discussions about daily successes. Since the emotional pressures and monotony of the work are a contributor to turnover, it is hoped that such techniques might alleviate some stresses and thus reduce turnover.
- Durcall should focus its coaching on the peak drop-off period immediately after training and consider an intermediate step between training and the live sales



environment to make the transition easier. Figure 2.2 shows that more than half of the company's losses in the first year occur in the opening two months and by focusing on this period has the potential for the biggest impact on turnover.

- Consideration should be given to further agent development in the form of industry related training that provides accredited certification. Such training can be financed out of SETA grants and provided the gains in tenure from such investment are forthcoming, this should more than offset any cost or lost productivity due to training time. In so doing, this training may further assist in agent development, enabling them to achieve their commission targets and better handle stress thus reducing staff churn.

## **5.5 Objective Four**

**Research Question:** To examine what impact supervisor support has on staff turnover

### **Discussion – Literature**

- The supervisor is the all-important link between management and the agent and they have a critical role which is multi-faceted:
  - Coach, trainer and mentor
  - Management's conduit to agents
  - Agents' liaison and buffer with management
  - HR policy implementers
  - Immediate source of intervention on client issues
- The literature is clear that a good relationship with a supervisor increases performance and tenure, and a bad relationship can lead to burnout and higher staff turnover.
- Deery et al., (2002) further found that positive supervision also contributed to a favourable disposition on the part of agents toward career opportunities and the importance therefore of the supervisors perceived standing within the business.
- The supervisor is also seen to personify the organisation and agents will perceive their treatment by the supervisor as indicative of the organisation and its values.

### **Discussion – Study**

- Although Table 4.21 reflected a positive response to whether agents believe their supervisors poses the skills necessary to manage them, thirty-one agents (14.3%)

expressed neutral or negative responses. The neutrals have been calculated here and in the points below, together with the negative responses, to reflect the potential magnitude of the issue in the business should the needs of those who are undecided not be adequately addressed. Alternatively, they offer an opportunity to be converted into positive responses with the appropriate interventions.

- Observation of the organisation reveals that agents are arranged into teams of between 10 and 12 agents. The inherent limitation of quantitative statistics does not allow for the determination of whether the responses above were spread around the business or are particular to two or three teams. Such knowledge would aid in identifying potentially weaker supervisors. Cognisance must also be taken of inherent concerns around confidentiality and whilst the fieldwork was set-up to minimise employee concerns, it's possible that some answers have been influenced by these concerns.
- The results returned from Question 22 show a similarity with those returned from the training questions related to agent up-skilling in that the aspects of coaching of skills fared lower on average than those returned for the general perception of supervisor competence with more agents expressing a negative or neutral response – forty agents (18.4%) when compared to the thirty-one agents above, suggesting that skills coaching (by trainer and supervisor) has room for improvement.
- Similarly, there was a further drop in positive responses to Question 23 regarding supervisor assistance with stress management in Table 4.23, where fifty-one agents (23.3%) reported neutral or negative responses.
- With 88.5% of respondents believing their supervisors are well respected within the organisation and this response being the most positive of those returned by agents regarding supervisors, this has positive implications for staff retention as the literature suggests agents reflect on their supervisors standing when considering their own careers.
- The single qualitative question also yielded negative responses related to supervisors and was conspicuous in being the only question raised elsewhere in the questionnaire to receive additional coverage in the open ended question.

## **Conclusion**

It would appear that the supervisor is the key to agent satisfaction and consequently their intentions to stay or leave. The supervisor's own skills, management style and interactions

are critical in retaining agents. These skills, whilst appreciated on the whole by agents, appear to be lacking somewhat in the particular areas of skills coaching and stress management. While the results revealed 81.6% of agents had a positive view of their supervisors assistance with their skills and 76.7% with their stress management, by default that leaves a significant proportion of the agent body who show room for improvement. Such stress management has been a repeated theme and is important to address if agents are to extend their tenure and reduce turnover at Durcall. Lastly, the way the rest of the organisation treats the supervisor has a direct bearing on an agent's own perceptions of the supervisor and the company, and may influence their aspirations to become one. The influence of the supervisor is multifaceted and pervasive in the work life of the agent, positive support may have a direct bearing on an agents ability to do their job through the passing on a skills but conversely inadequate support and mentorship may contribute to further churn as agents fail to cope with the pressures and requirements of the job.

## **Recommendations**

- It is important that the supervisors possess the diverse skill set necessary to manage agents and training to this end would be invaluable. The suggested training for supervisors should include both coaching skills and EQ training to better handle the emotional element of the day to day interactions with agents. The aim of this recommendation would be to addresses the percentage of agents who felt they weren't getting the necessary help in dealing with the stress of the job and in so doing reduce one of the contributors to staff turnover, namely stress management.
- It is further suggested that the supervisors Key Performance Indicators be reviewed to ensure they adequately cover the softer skills of people management. It is envisaged that improved management and supervisory techniques, while not changing the nature of the agent's job, might enhance the agent-supervisor relationship and positively contribute to agent tenure.
- Supervisors need to be provided with techniques and tools to break up the monotony of the day. Consideration should be given to setting up breakaway rooms with facilities that engage agents or simply introduce games, video clips or 'events' to provide short burst distractions to lessen the intensity of the work.

- Supervisors need to be incentivised to make agent wellbeing a priority. The cost of attrition will be far higher than the cost of an additional incentive linked to agent tenure or reduced absenteeism. By focusing on agents as individuals, those that have recorded negative responses or were neutral may be encouraged to stay longer, which in turn adds to their experience and ultimately their success in the role and so reduce staff turnover.

## 5.6 Objective Five

**Research Question:** To determine what impact peripheral factors such as transport, peer relationships, health and family responsibilities, have on staff turnover

### Discussion – Literature

- The literature revealed no significant findings between an agent's relationship with their peers and an intention to quit though, there is some support for the idea that it can lead to exhaustion.
- The issue of transport is an important practical consideration as many employees being young and working in what could be categorised as an entry level job, are often reliant on public transport, lift clubs or family members. The impact of transport difficulties on an agent's decision to look for more readily accessible employment, can't be underestimated. The problem is aggravated by longer or non-standard hours sometimes performed by agents when transport options are further diminished, and there appears to be a growing trend by employers to address this issue through financial assistance.
- The literature was confined to the potential impact that stresses and exhaustion might have on an agent's home life but while there is some support for the link between the two there are too many other factors at play to draw any meaningful conclusions. An agents domestic circumstances could be unrelated to their employment or the stresses of the job and this quantitative study did not seek to understand the underlying nature of these circumstances.
- Throughout the literature mention is made of the emotional labour that the job entails. The stress of constant monitoring, negative customer interactions, a lack of autonomy

and potential lack of support by a supervisor pose the potential risk of disengagement and increased staff turnover.

### **Discussion – Study**

- The study revealed an overwhelming positive response regarding agent's relationships with their peers with only a single agent recording a negative response.
- Agents' responses to the transport-related question revealed a lower than expected negative response with 6.9% of respondents declaring an issue with getting to and from work. Recent subsidised staff transport initiatives will have had a part to play in reducing this issue from that which was highlighted as a point of concern in Paragraph 2.4.6.2 of the Literature Review.
- The fact that female employees reported proportionally more negative responses to the ease of obtaining transport may suggest concerns over safety, particularly on late shifts.
- In response to whether potential domestic circumstances may influence the agent's decision to leave shortly, an alarming number of agents (46) believed this was a possibility and a further 48 were neutral or undecided. That is, 21.1% of the surveyed agents are possibly at risk of leaving due to some form of domestic issue or circumstance and a further 22% are undecided – a total of 43.1% of the agent body who could potentially churn if these statistics are read together. The quantitative study, by its nature, doesn't have the depth to reveal the underlying causes behind this response but the enormity of it warrants further investigation.
- Fifteen agents revealed a health issue that could potentially cause them to leave the organisation. A further 28 agents, or 13% of respondents, were neutral. Whether these are pre-existing conditions or an indication of stress related exhaustion is not known, but the implication for Durcall is another potential area of churn. This has to be compared however to the 176 agents and vast majority who revealed no health concerns and is therefore less concerning when compared to responses regarding agents domestic circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

The findings related to the peripheral factors aren't statistically reliable or replicable but nonetheless point to some specific areas of concern for the business that, if not addressed,

could lead to continued churn. It appears that more can be done for the 6.9% who are experiencing transport issues, to ensure agents are able to get to and from work and special focus needs to be given to potential concerns highlighted by responses from female staff members in Table 4.31. While potential health issues may impact a fraction of the agent body and influence their decision to leave the company, by far the biggest concern is the number of agents whose domestic situations might lead them to leave in the near future. Even excluding the concern over neutral or undecided responses, at least one in five agents in the business is at risk of leaving due to domestic circumstances – a massive proportion of the staff compliment.

### **Recommendations**

- Practical solutions need to be found to address potential concerns of female staff members regarding staff transport and more general consideration given to difficulties faced by agents. This can include but is not limited to:
  - Sourcing reputable transporters answerable to the company;
  - Facilitating lift clubs from within the organisation; and
  - Paying an additional travel allowance to agents working late shifts to facilitate transport closer to home.
- The underlying issues regarding domestic factors need to be understood in order to address them. The quantitative study gives no indication whether these are caused by family relocations, personal issues or similar and therefore it is difficult to give recommendations to address the issue, other than to encourage further research.
- The company could consider making available an in-house counsellor or contracting an outsider to address the issues that appear to affect many staff.
- The company also needs to increase its provision of occasional services such as basic medical check-ups on site, aids counselling and debt/savings management.

### **5.7 Suggestions for Further Research**

The literature highlighted the important differences between types of call centres but outside of industry surveys very little attention is given to the outbound sector in particular. It is recommended that further research be conducted specifically on outbound contact centres to increase the body of knowledge on this little researched part of the industry.

It is also suggested that a qualitative study of any of the factors covered by this research would yield far greater depth to the subject. The research highlighted particular points of significance, such as negative perceptions related to call centres as potential career opportunities and to the potential impact of employee's home life and relationships on their continued employment. An understanding of the first would be of particular significance to the industry in developing recommendations for its image and thereby attract a more stable and skilled workforce, as well as help promote the goals of Asgisa to promote the Business Process Outsourcing sector in the country.

## **5.8 Closing Remarks**

The aim of this research was to examine employee attrition and the impact of specific contributors on staff turnover, focusing on the specific circumstances at Durcall, with a view to providing recommendations.

Bearing in mind the limitations of the study, the findings emanating from the research demonstrated how agent attitudes and reasons for seeking employment with the company could have an impact on their tenure. The literature and findings demonstrated the importance of the recruitment, training and supervision functions in the agent's journey through the business and in particular the need to manage the negative effects of an intense and stressful work environment. The peripheral factors that were surveyed resulted in findings that, while not statistically reliable, offered an indication of areas of potential concern for further analysis.

Recommendations were provided based on the literature and findings of the survey together with suggestions for further studies. If the recommendations made are implemented and monitored, it is hoped that Durcall will be able to significantly reduce staff turnover and thus retain staff for longer periods, improve efficiency, reduce costs, improve service delivery to clients and improve Durcall's overall profitability.

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**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP**

**MBA Research Project**

**Researcher:** Craig de Busser (0824403370)

**Supervisor:** Dr Taffy Kriel (0357921494)

**Research Office:** Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

**STAFF TURNOVER AT A DURBAN OUTBOUND CALL CENTRE**

The purpose of this survey is to solicit information from sales agents regarding the impact of specific contributors to staff turnover on the sales floor. The information and ratings you provide will go a long way in helping us identify the relative impact of these contributors and possible strategies to address the attrition. The questionnaire should only take 5-10 minutes to complete. In this questionnaire, you are asked to indicate what is true for you, so there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to any question. Work as rapidly as you can. If you wish to make a comment please write it directly on the questionnaire itself. Make sure not to skip any questions. Thank you for participating.

<b>Informed Consent Letter 3C</b>
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**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP**

Dear Respondent,

**MBA Research Project**  
**Researcher:** Craig de Busser (0824403370)  
**Supervisor:** Dr Taffy Kriel (0357921494)  
**Research Office:** Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

I, **Craig de Busser**, am an MBA student at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **STAFF TURNOVER AT A DURBAN OUTBOUND CONTACT CENTRE**. The aim of this study is to examine employee attrition and the impact of specific contributors to staff turnover in the contact centre, with a view to providing suggestions to aide staff retention.

Through your participation I hope to better understand the impact of the specific factors identified as potential contributors to staff turnover in the company. The results of the questionnaire are intended to contribute to the development of staff retention strategies in the company.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this survey. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

**Please note that the information will not be utilised for any purpose other than for the research that I am conducting. The information that you provide will in no way be connected with your name and will not be viewed by management or any other party within the company.**

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The survey should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete. I hope you will take the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**This page is to be retained by participant**



**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP**

**MBA Research Project**

**Researcher:** Craig de Busser (0824403370)

**Supervisor:** Dr Taffy Kriel (0357921494)

**Research Office:** Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

**CONSENT**

I.....(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

**This page is to be retained by researcher**

# RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

## STAFF TURNOVER AT A DURBAN OUTBOUND CONTACT CENTRE

Please mark one option that best reflects your answer:

### BIOGRAPHICAL

#### 1. Age

(18-24) ☐ (25-34) ☐ (35-49) ☐ (50+) ☐

#### 2. Gender

Male ☐ Female ☐

#### 3. Race

African/Black ☐ Caucasian ☐ Coloured ☐ Indian ☐ Other ☐

#### 4. No of dependants

0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 3+ ☐

#### 5. Highest education

Below Matric ☐ Matric ☐ Certificate ☐ Diploma ☐ Degree ☐ Post Grad Qualification ☐

#### 6. How long have you been with the company?

<1 month ☐ 1-2months ☐ 3-6 months ☐ 6-12 months ☐ >12 months ☐

#### 7. Did you have prior call centre experience before starting at the company?

Yes ☐ No ☐

## REASONS FOR JOINING THE COMPANY

**8. I was unemployed (out of work) before joining the company**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**9. I took the job because it was easier to find employment in call centres than many other jobs**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

**10. I want a career in call centres**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

**11. I have moved between call centres in the past**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

**12. I moved to the company because the prospects are better than at my previous employer**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

## EXPECTATIONS AT RECRUITMENT

**13. The work is what I thought it would be**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

**14. The company has met the commitments it made at recruitment phase regarding pay, transport and campaigns**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

**15. I have the sales skills necessary to be a success at telesales**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

**16. The work environment is good (facilities and work area)**

strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

neutral ☐

disagree ☐

strongly disagree ☐

## TRAINING

### 17. Upfront training prepared me well for my job

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

### 18. Ongoing training has helped me to achieve my targets

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

### 19. Training helps me deal with the pressure/stress of the job

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

### 20. The training makes me think the organisation cares

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

## SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

### 21. My current supervisor has the skills to manage the team

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

### 22. My supervisor helps me improve my skills

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

### 23. My supervisor helps me to deal with job pressure (motivation and counselling)

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

### 24. My supervisor appears to be well respected by management/the company

strongly agree ☐    agree ☐    neutral ☐    disagree ☐    strongly disagree ☐

## PERIPHERAL FACTORS

**25. I get on well with my peers**

strongly agree ☐      agree ☐      neutral ☐      disagree ☐      strongly disagree ☐

**26. I can get to and from work easily**

strongly agree ☐      agree ☐      neutral ☐      disagree ☐      strongly disagree ☐

**27. My domestic situation (home/relationships) may influence my decision to leave the company in the near future**

strongly agree ☐      agree ☐      neutral ☐      disagree ☐      strongly disagree ☐

**28. There are existing health issues that could influence my decision to leave the company in the near future**

strongly agree ☐      agree ☐      neutral ☐      disagree ☐      strongly disagree ☐

## GENERAL COMMENT

**29. What does the company not get right that may influence your decision to leave in the future?** (Please write anywhere in the space below)

**Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire!**

17 September 2013

**Mr Craig R de Busser (921304802)**  
Graduate School of Business and Leadership  
Westville Campus

**Protocol reference number: HSS/1012/013M**  
**Project title: Staff turnover at a Durban Outbound Contact Centre**

Dear Mr De Busser

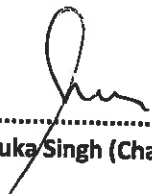
I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval.

**Expedited Approval**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**  
/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr Taffy Kriel and Mr Alec Bozas  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr E Munapo  
cc School Administrator: Ms W Clarke

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**INSPIRING GREATNESS**



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